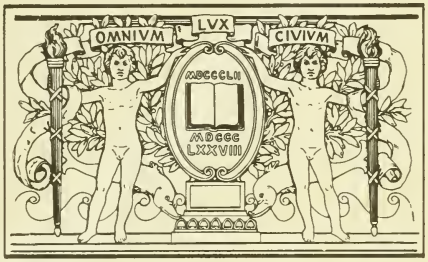
Mere Sentiment

A. J. Dawson



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MERE SENTIMENT

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BY A. J. DAWSON

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THE AUTHOR SENDS GREETINGS TO
A CHILD, AND TO A FEW MEN AND
WOMEN NOW ON CERTAIN OF THE
WORLD'S BEACHES, AND ELSEWHERE;
EPISODES IN WHOSE LIVES ARE HEREIN
TOUCHED UPON

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WATTLE-WORSHIP

'Your ghost will walk, you lover of trees
(If our loves remain),
In an English lane,
By a cornfield-side a-flutter with poppies,
Hark, those two in the hazel coppice—
A boy and a girl, if the good fates please,
Making love, say,—
The happier they!
Draw yourself up from the light of the moon,
And let them pass, as they will too soon,
With the bean-flowers' boon,
And the blackbird's tune,
And May, and June!'

ROBERT BROWNING.

MEN who liked Hatton Valyard at Oxford, said he was eccentric. Men who disliked him, then and when he left the university, affirmed that he was mad. Valyard was not liked by many people, and his own family—the Catholic Valyards of Shropshire, not the Cumberland family—positively hated him. They objected, for one thing, to his calling himself a Buddhist; but that about the man which they most disliked, was his obvious and utter indifference as to whether they liked him or not.

Complete as was apparently this indifference, it

was, notwithstanding, an affectation, assumed by Valyard to hide his real feeling, which was active dislike of his own people. Yet there were people who were more than attached to Hatton Valyard —people of whom he was devotedly fond; and to no person, and to no thing, was the man really indifferent.

He spent a year in London after leaving the university, and then, one Saturday morning, his mother in Shropshire received a telegram which read thus: 'Am sailing to-day in steamer *Rondo* for Ceylon and the South. Good-bye! Hatton.'

For a year he flitted about amongst Buddhist temples in the East. But, though the scented brilliancy of Asia appealed strongly to the romantic side of the man's nature, he was yet unsatisfied, and found no rest. Then, after some months spent in the Samoan group, Valyard wandered on to Australia; and in Brisbane, shortly after his arrival there, I met him.

Old Vivian, the millionaire squatter of Tumal, was in town then, and knowing that he was a man of old Shropshire Catholic family, I introduced him to Valyard at the club. The two strangely different men seemed rather drawn towards each other, and before the end of that week Valyard had accepted old Vivian's invitation to run down with him to the southern border-line, and spend a week or so at 'Cootra,' his Tumal cattle-station. The Oxford man left Brisbane with Vivian, and of what happened him in the South I learned partly from what I saw,

partly from old Vivian, and partly from Vivian's beautiful daughter, Jasmine.

Hatton Valyard loved beauty, as some men are said to love goodness; but his love was something he breathed and felt. He worshipped Nature as some men worship women; but into his worship there crept no reactionary intervals of blasphemy. So when, early on a spring-time evening, he arrived at Cootra by the Tumal coach, he was fascinated, and his ecstasy of Bush love began.

The Tumal country is not really the Bush, but a delicate tracery of that great, grey wilderness; set in a jewelled frame, and tinted, in his most voluptuous moments, by Nature's art instructor. Swaying creepers, bearing brilliant blossoms, take the place in Tumal of the grey, hanging bark of the Bush; thick, luscious grasses strangle each other in Tumal, where dead twigs and crackling leaves carpet the Bush; the dreamy hum of lazy insects, and the love-bird's throbbing cry, fill the place of the sad hush of the wilderness; and what the scraggy gum and the sombre black-butt are to the Bush, the vivid cactus and the tender wattle are to the Tumal district. So Valyard bared his head in loving reverence, and was faint with the sweetness of it all before he reached the Cootra homestead.

Rain had been falling all through the afternoon of that day, and only had ceased during the last half-hour of daylight, when all the country's face lay flushed in blushes, under the lusty kisses of

the setting sun. The bark of the great, whispering cedars was sodden, and threw out rich perfume into air already heavy with the fragrance of kyok-blossom, wattle-clusters, and the soft blackness of the Bush night. The very body of Mother Earth, yielding springily to iron-shod heels, seemed to proclaim its gratitude for the loveliness of life; and, as Hatton Valyard rode across the Cootra home-paddock by the side of his host, a soft breeze caressed idly the hair which lay upon his forehead, whilst all the mental sensuality of the man throbbed its response to the rich, vivid beauty of his surroundings.

And then he met Jasmine Vivian, the beautiful daughter of his host.

Jasmine's hair was not blue-black, but gleamingly black, like the dark stripes of a Bengal tiger. Her skin had the damp freshness of a custard-apple that has been plucked soon after dawn. Her eyes, though changing in different lights, were really the colour of beaten gold, and marvellously expressive. Her figure was a poem of sensuousness, and, in its movements, lithe as a carpet-snake's.

The hand she held out in greeting to her father's friend, as she met him on the homestead verandah, was warm and moist; and Hatton Valyard, looking at her through a mist of Nature-worship, was positively frightened by Jasmine's exquisite animalism. The lush, yet tender beauty of the idyl of Bush scenery through which he had been riding was, to the man, Nature ethereal-

ised, and something before which he reverently bared his head. The girl whose hand he now took, seemed to represent beauty that was more perfect, and yet was that of the animal against that of the spirit. So Valyard, fascinated, trembled, as much in fear as an antelope might be, trembling in the bright light of a rattlesnake's eyes. And the girl felt drawn towards her father's friend, first, because he was remarkably handsome, and again, because she saw in the moment during which their eyes met for the first time, that Valyard realised the full extent of her beauty as men she had been brought up amongst did not realise it.

During the two days which followed this meeting, Jasmine was annoyed to find that she would be unable to see anything of Hatton Valyard. Her father had arranged some time before that she should spend these two days at the homestead of a neighbour, some twenty-odd miles away. So she drove away from Cootra on the morning after her father's return home, and before the visitor left his room. She told herself that on her return she would learn to know Hatton Valyard the more quickly for this.

Beautiful Jasmine was wrong in telling herself this, for she was leaving a man already dazed in the fascination of the Tumal Bush—leaving him to strengthen the clinging tendrils of his own thraldom. She did not recognise then, that there were two high altars in the temple in which Valyard's nature worshipped, in which Valyard

was a fanatic. Both altars represented beauty; but one was of the spiritual and ideal, and the other was of the animal and actual—one of scents, and shades, and misty outlines; the other of breath, and colour, and rounded curves. Jasmine was the embodied realisation of one; the Tumal Bush was the heightened, perfected representation of the other.

And Jasmine was obliged to go away.

Chance directed that old Vivian should be a good deal occupied with the erection of new wool-sheds on his run; and so Valyard, with a couple of native boys and half a dozen horses at his command, was left to amuse himself. At another time the man would have been annoyed by the suggestion of Kismet in these things, and would have taken a pleasure in working out his life in a contrary direction. Now, he saw nothing but the sweet, luscious greenness of the Bush; heard nothing save the languid rustling of the golden wattle-clusters, in the great privacy of the Bush; felt nothing save the worshipping madness, the trance-like fascination, which all this moist tangle of wild tenderness drew from him and flung over him.

He rode out in the morning with a black boy at his side, and revelled all through the hot, throbbing day, in the beauty of the country round Cootra. He returned in the evening because the native boy led him to the homestead; and afterwards, when Vivian dozed on the big verandah, Valyard rode out again into the per-

fumed night, drinking in the hushed and silent charm of a sleeping forest drenched in moonlit dew. The day enthralled him. The night made him drunk—drunk as the maddest Hindu æsthete in all Asia. Old Vivian was too busy to see, and would not have realised what the fanaticism meant, if his every waking moment had been devoted to watching his friend.

Then, on the third evening, Jasmine, the beautiful, golden-eyed panther, returned to Cootra, wafting before her sprays of dainty femininity. Valyard trembled when she touched him, and drew the mantle of his Bush fanaticism closer round him. In courtesy he could not leave her, to take his evening ride; but afterwards, alone, he took a midnight walk, which saturated the very fibre of his heart-strings with the intoxication of half-peeled, dripping wattle-stems, cushioned cedar bark, tremulous kyok-blossom, and the great, wet leaves of the sassafras scrub. So, in the morning, he listened with half-closed eyes to the subtle music of Jasmine's voice. And the incense from his other altar floating round him in a cloud, he hardly saw the softly rounded curves, the caressing lissomness, nor yet the sunrise splendour of the golden eyes.

This disappointed Jasmine, and all the beautiful panther in her swore to wake longing in his eyes. But Valyard rode out after breakfast, whilst Jasmine, in another room, sat planning out a day they two should spend together. It was during that morning's ride that Valyard met Vena; and

his fanaticism then made him drunk by daylight. Any of the bullock-drivers camped round Cootra could have told him, had he asked them, of the queer, wild girl who lived alone in a humpy, where, five years before, her father had died. But nothing had led Valyard to ask, and so he found Vena out himself—happened upon her in the Bush, of which she had become a part.

Hatton Valyard rode that morning along the rutty bullock-track which crosses the creek below Cootra homestead, and leads away inward from the coach-road to the last point from which timber has been taken. Past this point the Englishman rode on between tall, straight tree-trunks, noticing at last that the bullock-track was gradually becoming a narrow bridle-path. Then, on a little stony ridge, the foot of which was hidden by young wattles, Valyard saw a small humpy, built gunyah-wise, with slab sides, and a roof of stringy-bark.

At the door of the humpy stood Vena, the strangest-looking girl, rich in the weirdest kind of beauty, and clad in the quaintest garb of semi-savagedom, that Valyard's eyes had ever seen. Ostensibly with a view to ascertaining his whereabouts, he reined in his horse that he might look at this human spirit of the Bush, with her long, straight hair of the same golden yellow colour as the wattle-clusters, her dark, hollow eyes wild as a dingo's, and her thin, half-clad limbs, delicately formed and graceful as a deer's.

As he forced his horse up the side of the ridge,

the girl lowered the small hand which had rested on the door of her hut, and drew more closely round her the wild-cat and 'possum skins of which her garments seemed chiefly formed.

And when one of Vivian's men rode past the ridge three hours later, driving stray bullocks, he saw this strange couple seated together on a fallen log, talking.

Valyard was late in returning to the homestead that evening, and as he sat at dinner with his host and his host's daughter, it seemed to Jasmine that nothing she could do would pierce the cloud of dreamy abstraction which hung about the man like a pall. Later in the evening, after playing German music to him in the big, dimly lighted drawing-room, with its heavy cedar-beamed ceiling, she sat beside him on the wide verandah, listening to the innumerable faint noises which make one notice the silence of the night at Cootra. Then she broke through Valyard's abstraction, and his eyes glistened when her soft hand touched his arm, to call his attention to some movement in the scrub below the rails of the home paddock.

He talked to her of the Bush, and she sympathised, till, leaning over her chair to emphasise his words of love for the creepers and the wattles, the sweetness of it all, blended with the perfume rising from her hair; and Valyard almost felt that it was love of Jasmine he was telling. Later, the Bush became something unreal and far away, whilst the warm, soft something at his side, and the fire in the golden eyes, was something very

real and near. And Valyard promised to ride with Jasmine next day to a neighbouring station.

When morning came, however, the man woke shortly after sunrise, and leaned far out of his bedroom window, to touch with his finger-tips the dripping, sparkling grass outside. Then he dressed and wandered out with a bridle in his hand, down across the dew-soaked paddock, to where three horses grazed near the creek. One of these horses he caught and bridled; and then, without thinking of saddle or spurs, he galloped off bareback, down the sodden bullock-track to the humpy on the little stony ridge, his Bush madness stronger on him than ever.

Vena was not there, and Valyard shivered with disappointment and dread, as he mounted his pony again, and galloped on past where the bullock-track became a bridle-path. Further and further he galloped along into the Bush, until the bridle-path gradually merged into a narrow sheep-track. And then he found Vena, sitting under a shelter of stringy-bark, at the foot of a black-butt tree. The fresh dew of the morning glittered in her wattle-coloured hair, and the deep, passionless eyes were cool and wild as those of a rock wallaby.

She said 'people had come' to the other place, and she would stay there no longer. Valyard sighed, remembering that he was of the 'people.' But he did not speak of love, because, though the beauty of the Tumal Bush, and still more of the Bush beyond, which Valyard did not know, was in

Vena's thin, straight limbs, and wild, lonely face; there was no woman in her. Later in the day he forgot, and voiced his madness, as he might have done to Jasmine. Vena sprang away from him like a startled deer when he kissed her bare arm. Then, gazing through him to the great, silent Bush beyond, she told the man to leave her.

So Valyard rode away to Cootra, and, sick with his madness, and faint for want of food, he met Jasmine at the homestead. The beautiful girl soothed him, being far too wise to ask questions. The reaction seemed to strengthen him, and in the evening he was all a man. On the verandah, in the moonlight, the panther purred responsive to his waking worship of reality; and, at ten o'clock that night, Hatton Valyard told beautiful Jasmine Vivian that he loved her.

That much is certain; and with her soft arms on his neck, he fainting under the weight of her beauty, she promised to be his wife. It is certain, too, that at three o'clock in the morning, when one of Vivian's boundary-riders walked past the open bedroom windows on the south side of Cootra homestead, Valyard was lying sleeping on his bed, with a light burning at his side and a spray of wattle-blossom on his pillow.

When Vivian came into the sunny breakfast-room after his morning walk to the stock-yard, and golden-eyed Jasmine sat on the verandah waiting for her lover, Valyard was nowhere to be found. The saddle he had used was in its place, but his bridle was not, and a wild black

gelding he had ridden once was missing from the home-paddock. Beautiful Jasmine sat waiting, and her golden eyes were wet; but Hatton Valyard was seen no more at Cootra.

A timber-getter who came to the homestead next day, said that shortly after sunrise on the previous morning, he had been riding in from the Yando hills, intending to make the bridle-path which leads into the bullock-track below Cootra.

It's only a sheep-track out yonder,' said the man; 'and where I was crossing, it falls into a gully, and then it's only a brumby-trail. After that—God knows! Well, climbing the far side of that gully, riding a black gelding, with a white blaze forehead, I saw a man. He was riding bareback, and before him on the gelding's withers he was holding that queer, wild girl, who used to live in a humpy where the bullock-track ends. When they saw me, they put the gelding to a gallop along the brumby-trail; and——Well, I don't know the country out beyond that, so—I let them rip!'

IN THE CLEAR PATCH

'One, glad because of the light, saith, "Shall not
The righteous judge of all the earth do right,
For behold the sparrows on the house-tops fall not
Save as seemeth to him good in his sight?"
And this man's joy shall have no abiding,
Through lights departing and lives dividing,
He is soon as one in the darkness hiding,
One loving darkness rather than light.

A little season of love and laughter,
Of light and life, and pleasure and pain,
And a horror of outer darkness after,
And dust returneth to dust again.
Then the lesser life shall be as the greater,
And the lover of life shall join the hater,
And the one thing cometh sooner or later,
And no one knoweth the loss or gain.

Love of my life! We had lights in season—
Hard to part from, harder to keep—
We had strength to labour and souls to reason,
And seeds to scatter and fruits to reap.
Though time estranges and fate disperses,
We have *had* our loves and our loving mercies;
Though the gifts of the light in the end are curses,
Yet bides the gift of the darkness—sleep!'

ADAM LINDSAY GORDON.

MY one objection to Carre in the old days in Sydney, was that he was so intensely and aggressively cynical. There was so much of his cynicism,

and it stuck out all over him, like politics on a newly elected member of Legislative Council.

He came out from England because he knew he could make a better living in Australia than in the old country; yet he expressed the most utter and serene contempt for the Colonies and for all things Colonial. He had always made his living as a surveyor; yet if there was one thing on earth more than another, about which he spoke with uniform bitterness and altogether unnecessary cynicism, it was the profession of surveying with all its kindred institutions and surroundings.

His pet subjects for satirical raillery outside the above, were women and religion. It was not that Carre talked caddishly or was a snob. On the contrary, he was unmistakably a gentleman, and a man who loathed bad form of any kind. But whenever he was in the society of men and the conversation turned to women, he spoke bitterly, and expressed entire unbelief in the possibility of virtue as an institution with the sex. Whenever he knew he could speak without particularly hurting any one's feelings, he treated religion of all kinds as a ridiculous old fable, and religious bodies as arrant humbug. Yet he was a man always popular at garden-parties, and was sought after by givers of evenings, and social functions of every kind.

It happened that when Arnold Carre arrived in Sydney, things in connection with his profession were very quiet; and after a stay of some months in the metropolis, he was glad to accept

the superintendence of a large surveying contract in the northern district. There was every prospect that this piece of work would occupy a good many months, and before Carre started for Stroud —the little old township which forms the centre of the Clarence river district—his friends in Sydney gave him a little farewell banquet. Without being in the least rude to his hosts, Carre managed to work into his little speech a good deal of raillery against banquets in particular, and the all-round insincerity of things in general, whilst speaking of 'the brilliancy of the prospects' before him, in 'the busy whirl of Australian provincial society.' However, we should have felt it unnatural if he had not talked in this way, and so everything was taken in perfectly good part.

Then he went to Stroud ; and of what followed I learned partly from his own lips, and partly from what residents of the district told me.

Carre went straight into his work on arrival at Stroud, did not use the two or three letters of introduction he carried with him, and took very little notice of the squatters, solicitors, doctors, and bank-managers, who represented society in that district. He could not, however, well help becoming known to many of the younger men in and around Stroud. And in this set he was fairly popular.

He was not a man who had ever been much interested in sport or recreation of any kind ; but the unconventional, reckless style of hunting

the brumby, or wild horse, in the north, appealed strongly to the excitement-loving side of his nature, and he became very fond of Bush riding. Horses, in this naturally rich but socially poor district, were very cheap, and stables, grooms, and fodder were quite superfluous adjuncts to the owning of horse-flesh. Carre kept two very decent ponies, and, like every one else in that part of the country, turned them out in the wide, rolling paddocks, with bells on their necks, when he was not using them.

There is something about Bush riding and hunting which has a wonderful fascination for most clean-run men. The mad excitement of a gallop down a mountain-side after a flying, snorting mob of brumbies, is a thing hard to beat; and the exhilarating effect of flying along neck-and-neck with the stallion leader of a mob, to wheel him through thick timber to the wing of a Bush yard, was a new and delicious sensation to the cynical surveyor. He, with four other men, was in the thick of a hunt of this description on one particular afternoon, while rain was coming down with that solid, persistent force often noticeable between the Clarence and Stephens rivers; when a gold presentation watch flew out of his pocket, snapped its chain, and fell. Carre just twitched his horse's mouth in hesitation for an instant, and then spurred on again with the rest. The loss of the watch was not sufficient to check the mad excitement of that furious gallop.

He did not speak to any one of his loss, but on

the next morning, as he was riding over the same tract of bush with two or three friends, he dismounted on the mountain-side where the accident had occurred, and muttering something about having lost a pipe, told his friends to ride on. His search occupied him rather longer than he had anticipated, but at last he found the watch, safe and sound, lying by the side of a little ant-hill. He mounted his horse and cantered off sideways down the hillside to join his companions. He could not find them.

Now, to one not brought up in its midst, the Australian Bush is a strangely bewildering place to wander in, alone. Before an hour had passed, Carre had demonstrated to himself the truth of this; and within two hours he had, whilst under the impression that he was riding in a bee-line for Stroud, twice revisited the spot at which he found the watch. This was disconcerting, and the cynic began to make nasty remarks to himself, about a country where civilisation had not advanced far enough for the 'production of bally bridle-paths.'

He was walking his horse, and looking about him in all directions between the trunks of the tall, grey gum-trees, when suddenly his eye caught a thin column of blue smoke rising slowly in the still atmosphere, and not more than a couple of hundred yards ahead of him. Starting off at a fast amble, a few seconds brought him into a small, clear patch of ground, surrounded by wattle-scrub and gum-trees, and having in its centre a tiny slab house. Standing on the

roughly constructed verandah in front of this cottage, was a young girl—a girl of apparently twenty or twenty-one years of age.

Now, from his own limited experience, Carre knew that the daughters of the average settler, or Bush timber-getter, were prosaic and uninteresting to a degree. True, they most of them could ride; but they were generally slipshod as to dress, commonplace as to features, and not over clean. Yet the girl who looked out at Carre from under the verandah of this desolate little Bush shanty, was beautiful; she was beautiful beyond the surveyor's ken of loveliness in women.

As he drew rein, the memory flashed across his mind of a wonderful oil-painting he had once seen in the gallery of a nobleman's mansion in the West of Ireland. The picture was a portrait of the Irish peer's daughter, dressed for a masquerade ball in the fanciful garb of gipsy queen. The girl on the verandah reminded him more of this than of anything else he had ever seen. Her hair, blue-black, was very soft and wavy, and hung upon her shoulders and white neck, in a disorder which was not untidiness. Set in this glorious natural frame was a face of the perfect type of Irish beauty. Skin of lustrous clearness and wonderful bloom; rich, perfectly shaped lips; small, straight nose; tiny, pink ears; and great, liquid brown eyes veiled by lashes of almost unnatural length.

The cynic paid his tribute to beauty by jumping from his horse, and raising his hat as he

reached the front of the verandah. In the ordinary course of events, he would have thrown one leg over the pommel of his saddle, and, remaining in his seat, would have addressed the girl from that elevation; for though always courteous, Carre had been long enough in the Bush to have adopted some of the free-and-easy customs of that vast Liberty Hall.

'Good morning! Pray excuse my trespass, but I have lost my way, and I thought you might set me right for a track or road leading to—somewhere!'

The young girl laughed in the most natural way in the world, and somewhat to the relief of Carre, who was beginning to ask himself if he might not be addressing some modernised nut-brown mayde, some Antipodean Lady of the Forest.

'You are within cooey of the coach-road,' she said; 'it is just the other side of those wattles in front.'

Carre thanked the Bush beauty, and stretched out one hand to his horse's withers, as he said, 'Can you tell me how far I am from Stroud?'

'Stroud is nearly five miles ahead of us on this road,' said the girl. And then, after a moment's hesitation, she added, 'But won't you hitch your horse up, and have some dinner before you start?'

Carre thought for a moment. He knew that this was quite in accordance with Bush customs. The sun told him that his usual lunch-hour was

past; and he felt strangely curious about the beautiful girl he had, as it were, unearthed in this wild wattle-scrub.

'Thank you very much!' he said at last; 'I should like nothing better, if it will not be inconvenient for you.'

The girl's great hazel eyes turned to him with bewildering directness, as she said seriously, 'No, indeed; it could not inconvenience me, because I have just made dinner ready for myself. But there is not very much of anything to eat, because, you know, I expected to be alone.'

Carre smiled inwardly. 'Oho!' thought he; 'then the husband or the father—I wonder which it is—is "dining out"!'

As the surveyor followed his hostess across the smooth, redwood planks of the verandah, he noticed, with some surprise, that her white, daintily formed feet and ankles were bare and uncovered. By the side of the door lay a small, strongly made pair of shoes, one of which Carre kicked as he stepped, marvelling greatly, into the little house. The furniture of the room in which he found himself was that of an ordinary Bush cottage, with one or two notable exceptions. The table was a rough one of cedar. There were two ordinary cane-seated chairs; but in one corner stood a good, though very old, morocco-bound easy-chair. The walls were of bare wood; but on one of them hung a portrait in oils of a fine-looking man, apparently in the prime of life, who was dressed in the uniform of a captain in the Royal Irish

Rifles. Almost everything else in the room was in the ordinary Bush style, save that in one corner stood a large bookcase crammed to overflowing with old, but well bound, books.

Carre sat down mechanically, and looked—as he felt—pure and unmixed astonishment.

'What is there that surprises you?' asked the girl seriously, and as though with a desire for information. 'Do you wonder at my living all alone here?'

'No!—yes! That is, do you live all alone?' said Carre awkwardly.

'Oh yes! I have lived alone ever since my husband left me, five months ago!'

Carre cleared his throat. 'Ever since — Did you——'

'Yes. My husband left me after we had been married a year.' The girl lowered her eyes, and the bloom on her cheeks turned a shade richer and darker.

By this time Carre was beyond ordinary feelings of surprise, and hardly wondered when he noticed that the spoon and fork in front of his plate were of an old pattern, and silver. Then he found himself eating thinly sliced and deliciously cooked corned beef, with carrots and dumplings—quite the Bush fare, but daintily served and perfectly prepared. When they had finished eating, the girl rose, and, going to the fire, returned after a few minutes, with two small cups of correctly made black coffee. In spite of what had gone before, Carre was not proof against this. His

usual nonchalance could not but be upset by the serving of genuine black coffee, after dinner, in a slab shanty in the Australian Bush—and that by a barefooted hostess.

'Well!' he said; 'this is too—Please excuse my impertinence, but would you mind telling me —all about yourself, and why you are here?'

The girl smiled, and having said, 'I don't quite understand you—I am here because, when my husband left me, I had nowhere else to go! My father died before!'—she paused.

Carre mechanically took a cigarette from his case. 'Will you allow me—er—My name is Carre—Arnold Carre. Would you mind telling me——'

'My name is Aileen,' said the girl, looking straight into Carre's eyes. 'My father's name was Featherston, but I have always been called Aileen.'

The surveyor lit his cigarette. 'Perhaps you will think me rude — Miss — Aileen; but I assure you I don't mean to be. It seems so extraordinary to my narrow English mind to find a—to find a lady living like this in the Bush. And, of course, I've no right to ask it; but I thought, perhaps, you would not mind telling me how it all began.'

The girl looked serious, but in no way disturbed or annoyed. 'I see!' she said; 'I understand you now; but it seems quite natural for me to live in the Bush, and I rather like being alone. You see, my mother died, when I was a baby, in Ireland;

and when I was seven years old, my father—That is my father,' pointing to the portrait on the wall—'my father was ruined, and we came out here. We went to Sydney; but I don't think my father was very good at office work—he had been too long a soldier—so we went up to Singleton. Father had a little money, and he bought a small farm; but I don't think he knew anything about farming, because we always seemed to be losing something. Father would not let me go to school, so he taught me on the farm. Then, when I was eighteen, he died. Poor father! He was very unfortunate. He told me when he was dying that I should have nothing when he was gone, because his creditors would take the farm. He told me to keep the bookcase and his portrait, and—to marry some one. He said, "It won't matter, dear; you will have the books, and you need not take much notice of the man; but he will provide you with a home and take care of you." Afterwards, when I was staying with some people in the township, a teamster came to the house, and stayed there. He said he owned a lot of cattle near the Clarence river, and in a little time he asked me if I would marry him. I remembered what father had told me, and said "Yes!" Then he brought me here with the few things I kept.'

She paused in her strange recital. 'And then?' said Carre, who had allowed his cigarette to go out, and seemed to be much interested. Aileen coloured a little. 'I did not like my husband

after we were married. He was rather a stupid man; and, when he came home after bullock-driving all day, he was rude sometimes, and drank too much. Then he met some woman whom he liked, in Booral; and one day he drove all his bullocks away, except one small team, and left a letter saying that he was sorry he had married me.'

Again she coloured slightly. 'The letter said that I was not a good wife, and was always "in the dumps, and talking nonsense." It said, too, that he was going to live in Victoria with the woman from Booral, and was never coming back. I was glad to be alone, and—I have stopped here ever since.'

Carre sat gazing at the girl's calm, seriously beautiful face for several minutes. He fancied he could see all the weird beauty, all the strange silence and wonderful depth of the Bush, in those great, humid brown eyes.

'And tell me,' he said at length; 'tell me, Miss——'

She broke in with, 'Please don't call me "Miss"; I don't like it! No one has ever called me that except my husband, before he married me!'

'I beg your pardon!' said Carre; 'but will you tell me how you manage, now that you are all alone—I mean financially?'

'Oh, there is the team of bullocks, you know! I hired them to a timber-getter, who sends me all the food and other things that I need, in exchange for the use of the fourteen bullocks. And then I

sometimes make little things in the way of clothing for the children of a few settlers who live between here and Booral!'

'And when the bullocks die?' ejaculated Carre questioningly, and yet half to himself.

'I don't know,' said the girl; 'but perhaps they will live as long as I do.'

Then they began to talk of other things; and as the shadows of the early Australian evening began to lengthen, Carre discovered that his companion knew quite as much of standard English literature as he did, rather more of poetry, and a great deal more of French and German works of a certain school. Suddenly he started to his feet, noticing for the first time how late in the afternoon it was.

'I must go!' he said, half-regretfully. 'Thank you so much for your hospitality, and the delightful chat we have had! And——'

'Why do you speak so strangely, so differently?' said the girl, turning her great eyes upon him in almost childish wonder. 'And why do you thank me for talking? We both talked, and it was pleasant to me.'

'I am very glad of that,' said Carre; 'I did not mean to speak strangely. May I—Will you allow me to come and see you again, Aileen?'

'Why, of course. I shall watch for you. I should like to talk to you every day.'

She said this quite seriously and naturally. Then she walked on to the verandah with him, and frankly held out her hand to say 'Good-bye!'

'What a glorious creature!' muttered Carre,

as he turned in his saddle to take a final look at the girl, before reaching the thick wattle-scrub which skirted the highroad. She was standing, bathed in all the red-gold splendour of the setting sun ; one shapely hand resting on the verandah post, the other shading those soft hazel eyes, as she watched her departing guest disappear amongst the leafy wattles.

Two days afterwards, a large square case was left for her by the Raymond Terrace coach, and this was marked, 'Dymock, Bookseller, Sydney.' Inside, and on the top of the books, was a little note from Carre, saying that he hoped Aileen would accept this little reminder of what he hoped would be only the first of many subsequent chats about books. The books contained in the case were all modern, and nearly all works of the better class of fiction.

On the following day Carre was again fortunate enough to dine in the slab cottage, and he thought Aileen looked more marvellously beautiful than before. She thanked him warmly and unaffectedly for his little present ; and later on, he asked permission to send her periodically from Stroud a few odds and ends which might be useful. In the same perfectly natural and serious manner in which she had given him permission to visit her again, she thanked the surveyor for his kindness, and said she should like the things very much. This resulted in a Stroud storekeeper visiting the house twice a week, bringing with him a thousand and one useful little commodities, and asking for

orders. This was done under instructions from Carre, who had bound the tradesman to secrecy, and who paid all the bills.

Then began a strange, happy life for Arnold Carre, and one that was equally strange, and even more happy, for the girl. He accepted his happiness without self-questioning; she hers, with marvelling gratitude. Carre frequently wrote his business letters, drew up specifications and so on, in the little cottage in the wattle-scrub. He was sometimes missed from the town of Stroud for two, and even three days. He was never seen in the evenings, and during a great part of the day he was supposed to be occupied in the country, as indeed he was. He told the young men who missed him from their hunting parties that he was labouring under a pressure of additional work which kept him always busy. He carefully observed the conventionalities in the matter of calling on the few families he knew, and often smiled quietly as he pictured to himself what the astonishment of these good people, and the professional and business men of the town, would be, if they but guessed anything as to that other life of his—that strangely romantic, and ideally natural life—which occupied so large a share of his thoughts, and would always be connected in his mind with sweet-scented wattle-blossom, and the great, brown eyes that had in them so wonderful an expression of childish purity and sweet, tender love.

He taught her to play picquet and euchre; and

they would sit together late at night, playing and chatting in the little cottage, whilst he smoked innumerable cigarettes, and tenderly watched the beautiful girl. At other times they would sit out on the verandah in cane lounges of Carre's importation, and talk far into the beautiful Southern night; he telling her again and again, in different ways, the old story of his passionate love—the story she loved so well;—she listening happily, and murmuring tenderly of her first and only love; the love that made her yield her pure heart so entirely to this woman-hater amongst surveyors.

She had been always beautiful, but her inner nature seemed to blossom, and her whole self to become transcendently lovely, under the influence of this first love of her life—as rich a gift, surely, as a man ever gained. This child of the Bush, with her hereditary and instinctive refinement, and the real cultivation that the artistic, lonely mind of her father had been able to bestow upon her; with all this she was absolutely natural, and her pure mind had conceived in its short life no single particle of affectation. Carre, with his various peculiarities, was a gentleman in every sense of the word, clean and artistic by nature, and a man of more than the average amount of the truest kind of cultivation. Small wonder, then, that these two lived for each other; that they were ideally happy; and that their lives were almost apart from the world, in their independent, self-contained delight.

Men noticed that Carre had dropped his sneering tone and cynical sayings. They noticed, too, that his temper could not be ruffled, and that he seemed ready to do good turns to all the world. But he guarded his happiness carefully, and none of the associates of that conventional life of his —the life that now seemed the unreal and temporary one—ever dreamed or guessed of anything at all in connection with the life of the clear patch, with the rippling creek on one side, the wattles on the other, and the dim, weird Bush behind. So the happy months went by, and Carre almost ceased to remember that he had ever been otherwise than in this dream of perfect love and ideal completeness.

Then, as he and Aileen sat watching the moon rising in silvery mystery over the tops of the tall, gaunt gum-trees one night, he had to impart an unpleasant piece of information.

'Little one, I have to go to Sydney to-morrow!' he said abruptly, and as though he hated the words.

'Oh, Love of mine! When—it is so near!'

'Sweetheart, I shall be here again in three days, and I must go, unless I am content to lose my only means of making a living for my Queen and —and for the little one!'

Aileen sighed as Carre stroked her wavy hair. 'Must you, Dear? Then of course I must bear it. But, oh my Heart! I had felt happy in knowing that you would be in my sight from now till—it was over!'

Her beautiful head sank upon his shoulder, and, for the first time for ten very happy months, her great eyes filled with tears other than those of pure happiness. But she brushed them away, and, smiling quiveringly, like the sun's light after a spring shower, said, 'We have been too happy, Dear! God thinks we should have waited—till afterwards, for such perfect happiness. He will try us by a little parting, and then let us be happier.'

Carre looked long and very tenderly at her. He talked to her of their future, of the new and added interest that was soon to come into their lives. He soothed her for hours, till she beamed tender happiness, before he rose to ride into Stroud, where he was to catch the early morning coach.

'Only three days, Heart of my heart, and I will count the seventy-two hours!' he said, as he held her in his arms before mounting his horse. Then he leaned over the pommel of his saddle, taking her head between his hands to look once more into that lovely face before he turned and galloped off towards the town.

He telegraphed to me to meet him in Sydney, and I hardly left his side during his brief stay in the capital. It was then that he told me of the wonderful happiness of his life, and I, as his closest friend, was the only man to whom he did speak of it. He was in a perfect fever to get away to the country again, and rushed through his business, careless almost of sleeping or eating. But the marvellous change which had come over

the man impressed every one who knew him, and many curious guesses were made as to its cause. I was enjoying a period of idleness at the time of his visit, and so interested was I in all that he had told me, and in his changed character, that I begged to be allowed to run down to Stroud with him and spend a few days there.

He readily agreed to this, but said with some hesitation, 'I don't think I can take you to her, old man—under the circumstances.'

I assured him that I expected nothing of the kind; and we started together from Sydney by a night train for Newcastle. When we arrived next afternoon in the rooms he occupied at Stroud, he ordered his black horse to be brought round, and, rushing into a change of clothing, prepared to ride out to the cottage.

When, after begging me to excuse him, he had cantered off down the quiet main street, I strolled out in the same direction, intending to ramble about till dinner-time.

Barely three-quarters of an hour afterwards, as I was leaning idly over the little bridge which led out of the town in the direction of Booral, I was startled by the steps of a galloping horse thundering down the hill behind me. I had hardly time to raise my head when the animal had rounded the bend at the foot of the little hill, and, scattering dust in my face with its flying heels, had crossed the bridge and was into the town.

It was Carre's black horse, flaked with foam, and dripping blood as it galloped, from under the

spurs Carre held to its heaving sides. The surveyor himself was hatless, and sat bent in the saddle like a man who rides for his life. From where I stood, gazing after this vision in real amazement, I could see the powerful brute thrown almost on to its haunches outside the green palings of Dr. Cartwright's neat little house, as Carre sprang from the saddle and struck furiously at the doctor's door with his whip. The horse simply stretched out its dripping neck and gasped, as it stood in the middle of the road. Then I ran into the town after my friend.

Carre was utterly indifferent now to what any one might think; and as I reached the doctor's house he swung the door open, and shouted to a boy on the other side of the road, to bring the two fastest horses down from the hotel; 'Quick, for your life!'

Five minutes afterwards, he and the doctor had galloped over the bridge together on the road to Booral. Carre had only spoken three words to me, and I do not think he knew then to whom he was speaking. His face was white and set, with an awful fear written on it; such fear as one sees on the face of a convict before the white cap is drawn on by the hangman. He had looked straight through me as he said, 'She is ill!' And then he had turned to spring on to his horse, never glancing at the panting black brute he had almost killed in the fury of his five-mile gallop from the cottage.

I sent this horse over to the hotel stables, and

having secured a mount for myself, started off in the direction taken by Carre and the doctor, after leaving an order with the local chemist for a woman to follow me in a cart, with any articles that the chemist thought it advisable to send.

Poor Carre! The doctor whispered to me as I entered the little cottage, that the girl could not live a dozen hours. She had been bitten by a snake, though that was not fatal. She had lain helpless and alone for nearly thirty hours when Carre arrived. And by her side lay a little, still, dead form.

A man might fairly pray that he should never have to witness a scene so piteous; so beyond the reach of all help, and heartbreaking in its horror. Carre was crouched on his hands and knees at her side, and his position never changed till she regained consciousness, three hours afterwards, and died within fifteen minutes of the time she opened her glorious eyes, and murmured, 'Arnold!'

That was the only word she uttered. But her great love for the numbed man at her side beamed out from her eyes up to the last moment of her life. The doctor and I almost carried him outside the cottage half an hour afterwards; and poor dead Aileen was left in the hands of the woman who had followed me from Stroud. Carre sat on the verandah till daylight came, and he could not be induced to move. Then he went into the cottage and sat by the side of his dead love for an hour, after which he came outside to me with

a stony and absolutely unearthly glare on his face. He asked me for a horse, and his voice was like the rattle in a dying man's throat.

Together, and without a word, we rode into the township. He would accept but little help, and himself gave the orders for Aileen's burial, which he said was to take place outside the cottage. He was gently remonstrated with on this point, and simply bowed his head and consented to the doctor's request that Aileen might be buried in the cemetery.

He attended the funeral, and stood by the grave till the last spadeful of earth had been thrown upon it. And not a muscle of his face moved. Then he rode with me out to the cottage. He was perfectly calm and collected, and even assured me of this, speaking in the same grating, tuneless voice as before. He asked me to return to Stroud, as he wanted to spend one night in the cottage, and to be alone, before he left the place. I shook his hand with a painful feeling of dread in my heart, as I mounted my horse and rode slowly back to Stroud.

Now the most peculiar part of this episode in a man's life, is the fact that from that moment up to the present day, no man, woman, nor child has seen or heard of, or been able to discover, the slightest trace of the existence, or the death, of Arnold Carre the surveyor.

THE IDEALIST CLUB

'Each pilgrim strong, who joins our throng,
Most eager to achieve, is
Foredoom'd ere long to swell the song,
"Ars longa, vita brevis."'

Ars Longa.

It was my good fortune, not very long ago, to snatch a grey-headed Bohemian from before the wheels of a Charing Cross omnibus, the carelessly driven horses of which had knocked him down in Fleet Street. I happened to be just on the spot at the right moment, and so, with hardly an effort, saved this man's life.

'I am a great deal obliged to you,' said the grey-headed man, as we pulled ourselves together on the curbstone; 'because I happen to be in the middle of the best story I ever wrote. Now tell me, my friend, what can I do to show you that I am grateful?'

Something about this apparently prematurely aged Bohemian interested me strongly, and I felt that I should like to talk to him and know him. So I said, 'There is really nothing to thank me for; but since you give me the right to ask something of you, I would say, let me go with you this evening, talk with you, and—stay with you!'

My new friend, whom instinct told me was an artist of some kind, paused, thoughtfully scratching the back of his head with the roll of manuscript to which he had held tightly when knocked down by the 'bus horses. 'Well,' he said slowly, 'I was going down to the Idealist Club, and I never heard of a visitor being taken there. However'—and here the man waved airily the roll of manuscript before referred to—'I do not see why it should not be done. Come, my friend, anyhow, and let us see!'

Turning hurriedly into one of the oldest of the many lanes off Fleet Street, the grey-headed man led me into a queer little court, which seemed to be walled in by all the concentrated back premises of Whitefriars. We passed through an iron gateway, by the side of which we left, caked in rust, and uncertain as to means of support, two of the huge extinguishers into which link-boys were at one time wont to jam their flaming torches. Walking down a mouldy-smelling passage-way, we came to a closed door, upon which I was just able to make out the legend, 'J. Flail and Co. (In liquidation.)' My elderly friend produced a key, measuring, perhaps, four inches in length, which he carried in his spectacle-case. Then he opened the door, and, followed by myself, entered the room beyond.

It was a large room, full of queer corners and oddly shaped abrasures. Eleven men were sitting there on high-backed chairs, and in various positions, all of which suggested some relation to a

long deal table, which was strewn with glasses, bottles, long pipes, and scattered piles of manuscript. Six candles and a big, ecclesiastical-looking lamp were burning in different parts of the room; and the ages of the eleven men seated there varied, I should say, from three-and-twenty to seventy-five. The man whom I considered over seventy years of age, rose to his feet as my friend and myself entered; and, stroking his ragged, white beard with one hand, said: 'You are late, Professor! Good evening! And—who is this with you?'

'I have taken the liberty of bringing a friend to the Idealist Club,' said my friend, replacing the big key in his spectacle-case as he spoke, 'because he wanted to come, and because he has just saved my life. Have you any objection, President?'

'Well,' said the old man, who had risen to his feet, reflectively, 'I don't know! I think it is a piece of infernal impudence, certainly. But, on the other hand, I don't see why you should not be infernally impudent if you choose, Professor. What do you think, my friends?'

'I don't see any reason to bother,' said a young man who was wearing a wide-brimmed soft hat.

'That's all right!' said my friend, abstractedly wiping his forehead with the roll of manuscript he carried.

'Will the Professor's friend take a chair then, please?' said the President, resuming his own seat. 'He will be dreadfully bored, but that is his own look-out, and he may sleep if he likes, of course.

For the rest, the friend of the Professor is not a man, I am sure, who will talk outside of names he hears mentioned here.' I bowed and sat down. 'Now, Professor! See to pipes and tobacco, please; and as we are all present, you might, if you feel inclined, let us know why you asked for a special meeting.'

My friend, addressed as Professor, handed me a huge box of wooden matches and a long pipe; and then, having evidently forgotten that tobacco is a useful ingredient in the sum-total of comfortable smoking, he rose to his feet to speak.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'you know that for many years I have been a hard worker in the art we all follow. I wanted to see you to-night because, at last, I have achieved something—not to entitle me to the far higher honour which an Idealist Club man may aspire to and reach, but yet—something. Something which I believe will be a great success in the world outside, and which will bring to me that fame which does not necessarily disgrace a member of this Club in the eyes of his brother members, and which, for reasons you know of, I have spent much of my life in trying to attain.'

'Professor, we congratulate you,' said the President. And ten voices echoed his remark with considerable warmth. 'Are you inclined to let us know what the screed is, Professor?'

'I have come here to submit it to you, my friends, in the hope, though that hope may sound presumptuous, of its earning your approval. My

story is in two parts, and the first I have here in my hand, completed. It will take fully two hours to read, but of course I shall be stopped if it tires any of my friends.'

'We are waiting, Professor,' said the President. And then my friend began to read his manuscript, whilst the members of the Idealist Club sat round him, in different attitudes, smoking and listening. As the Professor read on, he changed his position once or twice. And the perspiration trickled down his forehead, and sometimes filled his eyes, making his spectacles opaque. Then the Idealist Club members filled their glasses, whilst my friend wiped his.

I think this story was the sweetest and most tenderly pathetic thing I had ever heard or dreamed of; and when it was finished, I heard snuffly whispers of congratulation all round the long deal table.

'When will the other half be finished, Professor?' said the President, mopping his great wrinkled forehead as he spoke.

'It is half done now,' replied my friend, 'and I am working straight on. It will be finished on Tuesday.'

'Then I take it, my friends, the Club meets again on Tuesday evening; and since the Professor's friend was here to-night, it is only fair to ask him to come on Tuesday.'

The Club nodded, thoughtfully, like one man.

'Will the Professor's friend, then, if he feels inclined, join us on Tuesday evening?'

I bowed, and, having accepted the invitation with thanks, left the room with the Professor.

'If you would really care to come,' said the Professor, as together we walked into Fleet Street, 'you had better meet me on Tuesday, and come down with me. If you do not, then come and see me at another time. Here is my address, and—yes! there is my 'bus! Good night! Don't forget to come and see me!'

My grey-headed friend had torn a corner from his roll of manuscript, and scribbled on it in pencil his address. Then he scrambled on to the top of his 'bus; and I stood on the curbstone, watching his quaint figure, as he disappeared in a westerly direction.

. . . . . .

On the following Tuesday evening, at seven o'clock, a hansom put me down at No. 11 Grath Road, Chelsea, the address the old man had scribbled for me on the scrap of paper, which then reposed in my waistcoat pocket. It was a curious room in which I found my friend — my prematurely aged friend—and apparently served its proprietor as sleeping, living, smoking, and working den, with a curtained-off suggestion of cooking and bathing in one corner. The Professor's attire seemed to consist chiefly of a dressing-gown, and he was literally surrounded by sheets of loosely written manuscript. Everything in the room, from the uncovered, ink-splashed table, to the small, rug-covered bed, was exceedingly plain, and showed no desire whatever for adornment;

but on the narrow mantelshelf there stood, on a quaintly moulded bronze easel, a beautiful miniature in oils of a very beautiful girl.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, the Professor gathered together all his loose MSS., and, after a few minutes spent in the privacy of the curtained-off corner, he emerged equipped for travel.

Then we proceeded together to the dimly lighted passage-way in the court off Fleet Street, at the end of which one sees painted on a door the words, 'J. Flail and Co. (In liquidation.)'

The Professor drew the big key from his spectacle-case as before; and in another minute we were in the meeting-room of the Idealist Club. My friend was late again, as seemed perfectly natural; and so when we arrived the eleven other members of the Club were all sitting, waiting, in different positions near the long deal table, as on the occasion of my first visit.

'Good evening, Professor! You are late,' said the President. 'The Club is glad to see that the Professor's friend is here on this occasion; and wishes him "Good evening."'

I bowed in answer to the murmured greetings of the other members; and, accepting the seat pointed out to me by the President, I filled my pipe, and watched the Professor unrolling his manuscript.

'Is the story finished, Professor?' asked the young member who wore the wide-brimmed hat.

The Professor nodded in his absent-minded

way; and two minutes afterwards he had begun to read, standing, barrister fashion, with one foot resting on a chair, and facing all his brother members, who lay back in their seats, smoking and listening.

If the first part of the Professor's work had been sad and sweet, this second half was a poem in prose of clinging tenderness—the artist's ideal of perfect, unstrained pathos—delicately veiled in maiden purity, and drawn on a background of sadness that made one's very heart ache.

The Club sat drinking in the sweetness of it, with bated breath and misty eyes; unsmoked pipes being held the while neglected in mid-air. Then the Professor sat down, and began nervously to fill the glass at his side from a decanter.

The story had been told; the achievement was laid before the Club; and for a few minutes a whispered conversation was carried on, whilst the Professor sat, with shaking hands, filling his long pipe. Then the President rose to his feet.

'Professor, the Club congratulates you, and is indebted to you. In your modesty, you claim for your work merely that it will achieve in the world out yonder great success, and bring to you that fame which, for reasons we know of, part of your life has been spent in endeavouring to attain. You claim nothing more, Professor, because, being a workman, you are modest. But the Club considers that your work merits something higher and greater than this. And so we have decided to offer to you, Professor, the highest honour

which the Club has in its power to bestow upon a member and a worker.'

The Professor's hand shook so at this moment, that he overturned his glass on the long deal table beside him, and its contents streamed down on to the dusty floor of the room.

'Having regard'—continued the President, twisting his fingers in his long beard—'to the glorious tradition of the Club, which, recognising the impossibility of the world's appreciation of the Ideal, has formed a plan by which the Ideal, when achieved by a brother member, may yet be fittingly acknowledged; we have decided to place this story of yours on the plane last occupied by Eric Vanburgh's wonderful *Spotted Fairy*, fifteen years ago—to confer upon you, Professor, the knighthood of the Club, for which so many of us strive unavailingly—to here, in solemn conclave of appreciation, burn in the Club brazier your accomplishment of the Ideal; placing then its ashes, beyond the reach of the world's ignorant misapprehension, in the vase which holds the splendid relics of a century's achievements of the Idealists!'

The Professor rose in his chair, a ragged lock of iron-grey hair falling in moist tangle across his dripping forehead.

'But, gentlemen, my—oh, my half a life—I—Gentlemen, I thank you!'

Then he sat down with a gasp. And I, my eyes distended in amazement, watched the solemn burning, in a curiously wrought iron brazier, by

the Idealist Club, of that most perfect of all prose poems of tender pathos.

And when it was over, the Professor, pale and shaking as one in an ague, tottered out into Fleet Street, and the 'world out yonder,' on the arm of the white-bearded President; and my last visit to the Idealist Club was ended.

QUEEN GUINIVIERE

'It were enough to feel, to see
Thy soft eyes gazing tenderly,
And dream the rest—and burn and be
The secret food of fires unseen,
Couldst thou but be as thou hast been.

'After the slumber of the year
The woodland violets reappear,
All things revive in field or grove,
And sky and sea, but two, which move,
And for all others, life and love.'

SHELLEY.

HOWARD KERR told me all about this, when we were sitting behind the green blinds of the balcony that you reach if you climb the half-round flight of stone steps on the right of the wharf-end at Port Louis, in Mauritius. Howard Kerr is the man who saw bunyips somewhere near Tenterfield; and he knows almost everything that ever happened in Australia. We were talking about an Irish doctor who had just married a beautiful Creole girl, aged sixteen; and Kerr said, 'Everything in the way of life grows more quickly south of the line than north. Why——' And then he told me about Cal Ronaldson, whom, by the way, I remembered having once met at the 'Métropole,' in Sydney.

It appears Ronaldson could not help being called Cal. His name was Clare, but during his infancy his nurse, a woman of unassuming tastes, had altered it. Kindly relatives in England used to say of him, that 'there is a great deal more in Cal than will ever come out!' Cal's father, however, loved that which is tangible, and said his son would 'never do anything in the world.' So he was given a small sheep-run in New South Wales, and told to make a success of that, with the help of a good working overseer. This in itself was quaint, when one remembers all a man must be and do to succeed nowadays as a squatter. But what added piquancy to the situation was the fact that all young Ronaldson's tendencies were towards a literary life, and that, in a furtive way, he had written a good deal, and dreamed far more. He had his ideals too, this young man, and afforded a good deal of quiet amusement to his overseer when he first took up his abode at Burriwa, the station out back from Narrandera, which had been purchased for him by a Sydney agent.

When he had spent six months in studying sheep under M'Gowan, his overseer, Cal Ronaldson received from his father in England a letter of introduction to Mr. Arnold Matthews, the owner of Meadowlands. Meadowlands is one of the prettiest, and also one of the best paying, stations in New South Wales, and it is within two or three hours' ride of Narrandera. Cal

found the distance between Burriwa and Meadowlands to be just a hundred and sixty miles by road, and a hundred and thirty by bush track. That probably meant the greater part of three days' driving, or a big hole in two days' riding, with a good horse, and a night spent at Milpa. Ronaldson had never placed a very high value upon time, however, and M'Gowan having no serious objection to raise, the nominal master of Burriwa started one morning in a light tray buggy with two sterling little ponies, to drive in to Meadowlands.

The original hostess of Meadowlands had never been strong, and the summer months of the long drought of eight years before Ronaldson's arrival in Australia had proved too much for her. Therefore there was at that time no Mrs. Matthews. But the young Englishman did not feel her absence, for he had never seen the beautiful girl Arnold Matthews had courted five-and-twenty years ago, in Hampshire; and he now saw beautiful Hettie Matthews, the first child of the union that had followed that courtship.

She was just twenty-one years old, and when she put on a hat she robbed Meadowlands of half its sunshine, by covering a glinting mass of pale gold hair, such as Scandinavian artists love to dream of, and to play at painting. A wonderful picture was Hettie Matthews, standing in the wide hall of her father's homestead, with heavy cedar cross-beams for a background to her slim figure, and the pure profile with its

wavy setting of spring sunlight. Cal Ronaldson, with a head full of Shelley and Goethe, stared in fascinated wonder when he first saw Hettie in that hall. And then came blushing sunset glories up and down the fruit-shaped cheeks, and on to the creamy throat of her, as she turned to bring forward her little sister Guiniviere.

'My sister, Guiniviere, Mr. Ronaldson.'

She was twelve years of age, this little sister of beautiful Hettie Matthews; and Guiniviere—despite the hesitancy of want of use with which her sister uttered it—was the name by which she had been christened. The name had become Gwynnie, then Gwynn, and finally, Queen. It seemed natural and right that this little sister of Hettie should be Queen. She was so gracious, and so graceful. She had never played with dolls, but with fairy children by the score. Her speech had never been a childish lisp, but by a quaint playing upon, and combining of, words, she had spoken almost in a little language of her own. So Arnold Matthews' little daughter remained Queen, and every soul on the big station paid her willing court.

Cal Ronaldson stayed, in accordance with his first arrangement, for three days at Meadowlands. After this he wrote a longish letter to M'Gowan, and stayed another eighteen days with Mr. Matthews. Then, in the early morning fragrance of a day that came after three weeks of dreamy ecstasy, he took a long breath, such as a man

takes on the end of a spring-board, and bidding good-bye to the Matthews household, started on his hundred and sixty miles drive home to Burriwa.

For a man who would never do anything in the world, he certainly worked most phenomenally hard during the months which followed that morning; and with a result that was something suspiciously like promise of success. Then he accepted a friendly invitation from Arnold Matthews to spend a week or so at Meadowlands after the shearing. Instead of driving he rode by the bush track on this occasion, and covered the hundred and thirty miles by the early afternoon of the day after leaving Burriwa.

Queen, with her big greyhound, was standing looking dreamily over the top of the slip-panel in the home paddock fence, when Ronaldson cantered gaily across the culvert of the little creek, and dismounted to lift the rail which Queen's small hands could not move.

'I thought you would come early,' she said, gazing at him with pretty dignity from out her great brown eyes.

If Hettie's hair was like spring sunrise, then Queen's was like the fleecy upper edge of a dark cloud-bank, behind which the moon is rising, and splashing sepia tenderness.

'Is your father at home?' asked Ronaldson.

'No!' replied the child; 'I don't think father expected you till later. He has been away all day in Narrandera.'

'And your sister?'

'Yes, Hettie's at home. There, you can see her now on the verandah with Mr. Courtney.' And Cal Ronaldson, looking along the gently rising ground of the home paddock, saw the sunlight glinting on the pale gold hair, and Hettie Matthews, standing beside the tall figure of a man half-hidden by one of the great verandah posts.

It was a strange week that followed—strange to Hettie; perplexing to Courtney, the handsome young Englishman who, with a vague notion of taking up land, was just then doing the Colonies; unsatisfying and bewildering to Cal Ronaldson; and most wonderful of all to Queen, who, with her great dog Beauty, seemed to Ronaldson to be hovering in and out his range of vision during those seven days, like the fairy spirit of some other life. Arnold Matthews saw nothing, and Queen told only the big greyhound what she saw, and her soft brown eyes filled with tears in the telling.

Then came an evening when Cal Ronaldson was so sad that his very heart seemed to be weeping; and its tears were the more bitter because he could not tell himself exactly why he was so sad. He was a dreamer, with a mind full of poetic fancies. Courtney was a man of the world, with a mind full of masterful superficiality. Therefore, on that evening when Cal Ronaldson, in his sadness, sat out on the verandah in the soft darkness which had come after a sunset shower; Courtney

stood by Hettie's side in the drawing-room, talking of songs he had been singing to her accompaniment.

Then Queen, walking round the house with her dog, stepped in from the moist, sweet-smelling night of the Bush, and sat down on a low chair near Ronaldson. The owner of Burriwa could not see Queen's face, but her eyes, glistening in the darkness, were just visible to him, and he could hear the little jingle of the silver bangles on her wrists.

'Why are you so sad, Mr. Ronaldson?'

Beauty stretched out his fore-paws on the verandah, and raised his pointed muzzle, as one who would say, 'The Queen, my mistress, speaks! Let everybody listen!' The Englishman tried to smile in the darkness. And that was unnecessary, because Queen could not see his face.

'I don't think I am sad, Queen,' he said. And that also was unnecessary, because untrue.

'Oh yes! indeed you are very sad, and I am so sorry! Please tell me why it is you are so sad.'

Beauty touched Ronaldson's foot with one paw. Dogs will do these things, but the touch seemed to say, 'Do you hear the Queen's question?'

'If I am sad, Queen, I cannot tell you why, because I don't know.'

'Shall I tell you why?' said little Queen, very softly.

'You cannot, Queen; but—do if you can!'

'It is because—of Mr. Courtney!'

The dreamer's hand gave a little shiver, and brushed Queen's wrist.

'Why because of Mr. Courtney?'

'Because—oh, because of Hettie!' Queen's voice was a whisper. 'And please, Mr. Ronaldson, you mustn't, because Hettie doesn't like any one at all, but—you; and——'

The queenly little head bent at last, and two big tears dropped on to the muzzle of the dog. Cal Ronaldson, hearing the sob, started in surprise.

'Dear little Queen! you mustn't cry,' he said; 'if I am sad, that is my own fault; and—and what makes you say your sister likes me, Queen?'

'I know,' said the child simply. 'And oh, please, don't be sad, because I—it hurts me!'

'You dear little Queen, I won't be sad! I will be very happy, because I love her, Queen; and you have made me happy!'

'Yes, I know!' The child's voice trembled. She had risen to her feet, and stood with one tiny hand resting on the dog's collar. Cal Ronaldson rose too, and then he stooped down and kissed the child's forehead.

'Oh, don't do that!' she said, with a sob in her voice. And then, turning abruptly in the darkness, she walked away—having taught Cal Ronaldson something he had not before been able to tell himself.

On the following day Courtney, the other guest at Meadowlands, was to leave the station on a trip to Barmedman and the country beyond the Lachlan. So during the evening he hardly left

the side of Hettie Matthews. But if Courtney were at her left hand, Cal Ronaldson was at her right; and Arnold Matthews' eyes closed after a long day's riding; and Queen's big, wistful eyes followed her sister and the two Englishmen, till her bedtime came.

Three days afterwards the owner of Burriwa station told beautiful Hettie he loved her. The man woke from his dreams and poured out all the poetry in him at the feet of this girl. There was passion in every word he spoke, and a strong man's love in his tones as they rose and fell, dropping at last to quivering tenderness, like an organ's dying notes, to the ears of the girl who listened. The slender white neck was curved, and her beautiful head bent till its frame of pale gold brushed the Englishman's coat. His manhood had won her the more easily because it came to her in all the strength of the first rush with which it surged up in him, from out the vagueness of his dreams.

Arnold Matthews had nothing to say against the son of his old friend as a husband for his daughter; and so, after a week's happiness together, Hettie said good-bye to her lover, as a lover, and he rode away on his return journey to his own station. The young squatter himself may have noticed it, but no one else saw, that when Queen held out her little hand with childish dignity to say good-bye to Hettie's lover, her brown eyes were filled with tears. 'You will not be sad any more!' she murmured; and Cal

Ronaldson would have bent down to kiss his good-bye, but something caused him to refrain. And so he rode away.

Twice a week came letters by the coach, and a month passed quickly. Then Queen was sent on a visit to some friends of her father's, who lived at Wentworth, on the Blue Mountains. She had been growing very pale and languid, and Arnold Matthews said the change of air would do her good. She had always been quiet and inclined to dreaminess, but now she hardly spoke save to Hettie, whose hair she would stroke sometimes as she said, 'Beautiful Hettie,' or at other times, 'Queen loves you, too, Hettie.' And the older sister would kiss her, half-wondering at the wistful, loving look of admiration in the child's eyes.

While Queen was away at Wentworth, Courtney, looking handsomer than ever after six weeks' riding in the sunshine, returned to hospitable Meadowlands, and was made much of by Arnold Matthews. Then came a letter from Wentworth saying that, so far, the change of air seemed to have been the reverse of beneficial in its effect upon little Queen. 'We are quite uneasy about her,' wrote the good lady to whose care Arnold Matthews had intrusted his little daughter; 'she is so wan and listless, poor little soul, and eats next to nothing!'

So the host of Meadowlands, to whom this little girl was very dear, travelled post-haste to Wentworth, and brought Queen home again. When Mr. Matthews returned to the homestead,

his courtly little daughter sitting by his side on the cushions of the big buggy, with one tiny hand resting on her father's arm; Hettie was standing on the verandah, with Courtney, to welcome them. During that evening, pale little Queen, whose languid air, whilst in itself wholly sad and pathetic, yet harmonised very sweetly with her miniature dignity and baby stateliness, grew noticeably more sad and abstracted.

It was late when Cal Ronaldson's betrothed retired for the night, and almost immediately after closing the door of her room she was surprised to hear a gentle tapping upon it from outside. She opened the door, expecting to see a servant, and found her little sister standing on the black rug outside. There stood Queen, like a sculptor's dream of perfect purity embodied in white marble. A stray moonbeam, shining through a great skylight in the roof of the hall, kissed softly the long dark curls that fell over her draped shoulders; and her little feet, with their delicate blue vein tracery, looked cold and in some way not earthly, as they peered from under the hem of her white gown.

'Queen!' ejaculated Hettie, in real astonishment; 'what are you doing out of bed? You ought to have been asleep hours ago, dear!'

'Hettie! Hettie! How can you bear to do it?'

The girl, whose hair was sunrise glory, shivered, though she was fully dressed. 'Do what, child?' she said.

'Oh, Hettie! How can you? It is wicked!'

Little Queen trembled and would have fallen, but her sister, bending forward, caught the little white draped form in her two arms, and carried the child back to the bed she had left.

'Oh, Hettie! when he loves you so! Oh, please, beautiful Hettie, don't hurt him! Mr. Courtney is a bad man; and—please, Hettie dear!'

Queen was sitting in the bed, and great tears were rolling down her pale cheeks. 'My dear little Queen, you are ill!' said Hettie; 'you are fancying things. I have not—I am not—you are fancying things, dear, and you must forget them and go to sleep.'

For almost an hour Cal Ronaldson's betrothed sat trying to soothe her sister; and at last the little form lay quiet and still. The long wet eyelashes were lowered, and the weary little breast rose and fell in even, gentle breathing. Nature, the mother, had done what Hettie, the sister, could not do; and Queen slept from sheer exhaustion. Then the older sister crept softly from the side of that whitest of beds, to her own room; and, during the early morning, beautiful Hettie Matthews slept also.

Everything went on as usual next day, and Hettie only once caught her little sister's glance—a curious look of blended entreaty and reproach—when Mr. Courtney proposed a ride in the afternoon.

In the early evening, and before the moon rose to soften, with its pale purity, the darkness of

the Bush, Queen sat with her big greyhound on the verandah, as she had sat on the night of Cal Ronaldson's awakening from his dreams. As the child sat there, golden-haired Hettie, with Courtney at her side, walked out from the drawing-room into the cool night air which filled the verandah with its sweetness. Little Queen, sitting in the darkest patch of all the evening's darkness, was not seen and could not see, more than the creamy waves of lace round Hettie's neck, and the white line of Courtney's collar.

Hettie and Courtney walked down the verandah as far as the windows of the breakfast-room, and as they paused, Queen, in her dark corner, shuddered so that the bangles on her thin wrists made little faint noises. The white collar had almost touched the cloud of lace, and the child heard Hettie say nervously, 'Oh, you must not, you must not!'

'And why, sweet Hettie?' The man's voice was less clearly audible because more gruff.

'You forget——'

'Hettie, I forget nothing; but——'

The little figure of the child rose from the low chair, and, Beauty by her side, Queen walked firmly down the middle of the verandah, in through the open hall-door, and straight to her own bedroom. Falling on her knees beside the white bed, burying her head in the mosquito-curtain's gauzy folds, Queen called on Heaven to stay the flood of tears which, rushing up from her child's heart, made the brown eyes sightless.

'Please, God, make him go away, and keep beautiful Hettie for——Oh, please, God!' This was the refrain of her prayer, but much of it was less coherent and more sad.

Hours afterwards, still fully dressed, Queen sat on the side of her bed, thinking and wondering, and sometimes murmuring parts of her childish thoughts aloud. Once she whispered, 'Oh, he must come! He said he could not live without Hettie—beautiful Hettie; he said——Please, God, you will let him come! He must not die! It took him less than two days—a hundred and forty miles! Please, God, make Blossom very strong; and—oh, won't it ever be daytime?'

By and by the sky grew slaty grey, with a few faint lines of purple in it. Then Queen gave a weary little sigh of relief that was half a sob of pain; and, carrying her big straw hat in one hand, she walked on tip-toe silently out of the room, down the shadowy hall, and out into the greyness of the early morning. Down through the rich grass, a few steps in which turned her little brown boots almost black, so heavily laden was it with dew, Queen walked to the hollow where the creek ran under the home paddock fence.

'Oh, Blossom dear!' she murmured, looking anxiously round the familiar place; 'surely you haven't gone away?' A few minutes afterwards she found the wiry little pony, which represented her father's last birthday present, and, with one tiny hand on the animal's withers, she led her favourite to the first of the innumerable outhouses

of the sleeping homestead. Staggering under the light weight of her elaborately worked little side-saddle ; bruising her tender fingers with its girth buckles, and pleading prettily for Blossom's assistance with the bit and bridle ; Queen at last finished the harnessing of her pony. A little hesitating, downward look of disapproval told the child that she was not dressed for riding, and, her love of fitness triumphing, she left Blossom standing at the outhouse door and crept back to her bedroom, to return a few minutes later, when a little dark brown riding-habit had taken the place of her frock.

Ten minutes afterwards she and Blossom and the greyhound were outside the home paddock, and, crossing the culvert over the creek, had entered the Bush beyond, by the track down which Cal Ronaldson had cantered on the afternoon of his last visit to Meadowlands. Queen's face was white and set, with a little spot of bright colour in each cheek, and dark hollows under the tender brown eyes.

. . . . . .

Cal Ronaldson had not been very happy during the past fortnight, because he had only received two letters from beautiful Hettie Matthews, instead of four. But he was pleased with the progress he had made in his work at Burriwa ; and on this evening, when he was riding towards Meadowlands to see the lady of his love, with her hair of sunrise gold, and the sweet, pure profile he saw always in his dreams, Ronaldson laughed to himself, mocking his little fears, and singing to let

out the happiness of his lover's heart. Suddenly, and as he rounded a sharp bend in the track, he stopped singing, for his eye had caught the outline of a horse standing in the middle of the path, some twenty or thirty yards in front of him.

He reined in his own mount, and a little muttered exclamation of surprise fell from his lips as he noticed that the horse standing before him was saddled, and standing with its head drooping over a small dark figure on the ground. Then he noticed a greyhound stretched beside the dark form with head upraised, and a questioning look in its expressive eyes.

Recognition coming in a flash, the young squatter dropped the bridle of his tired horse, and fell on one knee beside the little figure. 'My God, Beauty!' he exclaimed, with a tremor in his voice. And then with tender care he lifted the dark form from the ground, knowing without looking at the white face, that he had found Beauty's child-mistress, there in the Bush, sixty miles and more from Meadowlands.

Queen was insensible, but Ronaldson saw no mark of any kind of wound upon her, as he gently drew out the dead leaves and little twigs which had clung to her dark curls. Then, very carefully, he mounted his horse, still holding the little form in his arms, and, driving Blossom before him as he chafed Queen's little hands between his own, he rode slowly on to Milpa.

Queen regained consciousness at Milpa, under the care of the postmaster's wife; but she only

smiled faintly as her sister's lover bent over the bed upon which she lay, and for some time the weak little body would not let even the few words the brave heart wanted to say, escape her quivering lips.

Some little time elapsed, and then, bending low over the child's head, Cal Ronaldson was able to catch the words, 'Please go to Meadowlands.' Then came a break, and afterwards, more weakly still—'Because Hettie wants you.'

The Englishman's eyes filled with tears as he nodded in reply, 'Yes, yes, dear little Queen! I will go.' And then he left the room for a while to walk up and down in the cool air outside, till the doctor should arrive from Tumal, twenty-five miles away.

'You have sent for her father?' was what the medical man said, questioningly, after a quarter of an hour spent in the room where Queen lay, with one thin hand resting on the muzzle of the dog Beauty, raised to the bedside.

'At eight in the evening,' said Ronaldson; 'so he ought to be here by ten or eleven this morning, anyhow.'

'Ah, no later, I hope! no later than that. And I am half afraid——'

'Oh, for God's sake, doctor, try and save her!' said the Englishman imploringly.

At nine o'clock in the morning, as Cal Ronaldson, with a haggard, frightened look on his face, sat at her bedside, Queen's voice came to her, and she began to speak in faint, broken whispers.

'You will go soon?' she said, touching the man's cold hand with her thin fingers.

'Yes, Queen dear, I will go very soon; but —why would you hurry me, Queen?'

'Because—oh, because Hettie wants you, and I want you to be with her!'

The man could hardly keep from groaning as he thought of the price the child had paid to gratify her loving wish. 'But, Queen—dear little Queen!' he said, with a moaning sob in his voice: 'what made you ride out here all alone, for my sake, to bring me to Hettie? What made you do so much for me?'

The child moved slightly in the bed, and raised her queenly little head with its frame of dark curls. The great brown eyes seemed to look calmly, trustingly, right down into Ronaldson's soul; and the man by the side of the bed shook from head to foot as the little sister of his betrothed said, 'Oh, you must know! It was because—because I love you!'

And then, as the Englishman raised the blue-veined fingers to his lips, Queen's dark head fell back on the pillow. The child had told the secret of her woman's heart, and little Queen said nothing more.

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When Howard Kerr had told me this, behind the green blinds of the little balcony, near the end of the Port Louis wharf, he jumped to his feet and coughed as he walked to the winding stone stairs. Half a minute afterwards I heard him

swearing violently at two coolies outside; and, leaning over the balcony rail, I said, 'Kerr! what about the girl with pale gold hair?'

Kerr looked up in the bright sunlight, and his eyes were very red. 'Good heavens! didn't you hear of the Courtney marriage? I—I will tell you another time!'

I have not seen Kerr since.

THE QUEEN OF AJASSA SIDE

"'When I last saw Waring——"
(How all turned to him who spoke!)
"You saw Waring? Truth or joke?
In land travel, or seafaring?"'

ROBERT BROWNING.

IT was J. L. Powell who told me all about the affair of Dr. Keith Boswell, when he (Powell) was leaving Lagos. Powell is not an imaginative man—he is too rich to be imaginative—and what he told me was truth.

No one knew exactly why Keith Boswell lived in West Africa, but every one was glad to have him there. He had a large private income, and, though it is true he practised as a doctor, yet he generally refused his fees, and every one saw that he made next to nothing out of his profession. Still he remained on the Coast, and went through periodical little attacks of fever in the most good-humoured way imaginable. This was peculiar, because West Africa is not a pleasing place in any single sense. However, Boswell knew pretty well every white man from Sierre Leone to the Congo, and used to dodge up and down from port to port, spending a week with one man and a month with another,

in a sociable and altogether charming and indefinite manner.

He was young, too—not more than thirty years of age—and the kind of man who would be popular and well known anywhere. He was a born Bohemian, was Dr. Boswell, and he loved to lead a strange, adventurous kind of life. Any whimsicality, any odd experience, or unusual way of doing things, pleased his fancy; and, amongst other peculiarities, he was addicted to mixing himself up in native life. There were times when he had been seen and recognised in the garb of a river chief, and he made no secret of his habit of attending native feasts and ceremonies of various kinds. Then he could converse fluently in half a dozen different African dialects, from Fantee to 'Benin side,' and he could eat palm-oil chop with any darkey breathing. These things are all very well in the way of amusements to be occasionally indulged in. But as a habit they are as bad as opium-smoking —for a white man. Men who know nothing of such matters may, and will, continue to rant about their coloured brethren, and racial equality, till all's blue—or whitey-brown; but the man who, in practice, ignores the laws of colour, makes a mistake. And he generally suffers for it.

Now, all went well with Dr. Keith Boswell, and he was probably the most contented man on the Coast, till he attended the ceremony of the installation into office of young King Munyar. The old king had died of over-eating and want

of exercise, and his son Munyar was to be formally installed in his place at the age of about seventeen or eighteen. Munyar was a splendid barbarian, and at that age—the early prime of tropical manhood—was about as fine a specimen of the African savage as one could wish to see. He had never been allowed to attend a mission school, or to receive any education, and it is probable that in his short life he had never known what a thwarted desire or an unrealised wish meant.

Keith Boswell arrayed himself in all his most gorgeous African paraphernalia, and went up to Ajassa to join in the three days' feasting and rioting which were to precede Munyar's coronation.

On the evening of the first day of the feasting, he took a stroll through the village, and on his way back he paused outside Chief Karelah's camp. That was in the full light of day, when the rays of the sinking sun were sending a warm red glow over all the thatched roofs, and beautifying even the bodies of the drunken natives, who were lying round about on the ground. The reason of the doctor's stopping by Karelah's camp was that, standing in the doorway of its main hut, he saw the most beautiful girl in West Africa.

Keith Boswell liked native beauty, and he was simply stupefied by this vision of loveliness in burnished gold. Any man would have admired her, for when an Ajassa woman is pretty she is a beautiful object. And, further,

though it was not every one who recognised the fact, Karelah's daughter Sadra was the finest-looking girl on the Coast. Her skin was the colour of very fine and highly polished copper, and in the light of the setting sun it was golden. Her hair was very long, and had a wavy ripple, but not a sign of woolliness in it. Her hands and feet were tiny, soft, and dimpled; her figure was a dream of graceful curves and lissom undulations; and her delicate features were far more like those of a highly bred Arab than a West African. Karelah, her father, was an ugly enough man, in all conscience, though of exceptionally fine physique, but her mother was an Accra woman, and the child of generations of savage kings.

The doctor gazed in fascinated wonder at her, till she raised her wonderful black eyes and looked at him. And then he stammeringly wished her good evening, speaking in her native dialect. The girl smiled, for she at once recognised his nationality, and answered him in very good English, though in the sense of her own language. Her accent was good, and her pronunciation correct, but she used the forms of speech, and the peculiar, picturesque grouping of words, of the Ajassa vernacular. 'May the night be pleasant to you, son of white men,' was what she said, and this struck pleasingly on Boswell's ear; for, as a rule, when the native learns the language of the North, he speaks it with prosaic correctness, if well educated, or with

almost unintelligible incorrectness if only partially schooled.

The doctor stood there, leaning on the roughly constructed fence and talking to the beautiful girl, till the darkness of the tropical night made her invisible, and the singing and shouting of the men who had before been sleeping rendered her musical voice almost inaudible. She had dropped into the vernacular, which Boswell spoke with perfect ease, and, as she turned in the doorway and wished him 'Good night,' she called him 'friend.' He could hear the jingle of her bracelets and neck ornaments as she moved, and he felt a strong desire to walk into the inclosure, to touch her little hand—the hand which, in the darkness, he could not see. But he was still fairly cool, and so, having bid her 'Good night,' he turned and walked towards the king's camp.

He charmed the heart of Karelah with flattery that night, and told the chief that he would like to meet his wives and family. In Western Africa there is very little of that secrecy and reserve which characterise the domestic life of an Eastern potentate; and Karelah readily promised to make the white 'medicine man,' who was always so friendly and liberal with advice, known to his women-kind. He went further, and asked Boswell to come with him, after Munyar had been made king, and spend some time in his permanent camp in the centre of his own district, fifteen or twenty miles away. The doctor

thought of the beautiful girl who had told him her name was Sadra, and all the adventurer and Bohemian in him made him eagerly accept the invitation. Now, this was unwise, because Sadra was not of his colour. And, further, though he did not at the time know this, she was intended as a wife for the young king in whose honour Boswell was feasting.

King Munyar admired the white doctor immensely, and was pleased to have him as a guest during the feasting and ceremonies of the royal installation. He used to copy Boswell's dress and manner, and was proud to have the man as a friend. The doctor, on his side, admired Munyar as a picturesque young savage, and liked him as a good-natured fellow, and as a power amongst the natives. Beyond this, there was nothing between them, and they had not known each other very long.

During the three days' revelry which preceded the final ceremony of coronation, Boswell spent several hours in Karelah's camp, and, before the week was over, he and Sadra were very good friends. Then came a general exodus of visitors from the settlement—Munyar having been duly proclaimed king—and Keith Boswell proceeded in Karelah's big war-canoe to the chief's home in the interior. Sadra's father had an extensive camp in his own village, and was able to entertain the doctor in very good style. His slaves and subjects traded away for him, every year, a large amount of palm-oil

and kernels; and all the luxuries that were imported by the white merchants on the Coast, Karelah enjoyed possession of. During the day he was generally out and about in his canoe, or being carried by his slaves, and Boswell was free to sit with, and talk to, the chief's beautiful daughter for hours together. Sadra's mother was faded, and long past her prime. Karelah rarely spoke to her. But his dependents always showed every respect to the mother of the 'Queen of Ajassa Side,' as Sadra was called. She earned this name partly by reason of her wonderful fairness and beauty, and partly because every one considered that, when she married, she would be Munyar's favourite wife.

It was a strange life that Boswell led in that wild jungle home, where no white skin, save his own, was ever seen. And the strangeness and oddity of it fascinated him, apart altogether from the influence which Sadra exerted over him. So little was known of white men in that district that the doctor was treated with almost reverential deference, and his slightest wish, though only half-expressed, was promptly carried out by willing hands. Sadra's mother liked him for the courtesy with which he always treated her. She was flattered by the attentions which this white friend of the king paid to her daughter and herself. She rather encouraged than otherwise his friendliness with Sadra, and, when it was discovered that the 'medicine man' liked to sit talking with Karelah's

lovely daughter through the long, hot mornings, and in the early nights, when the chief was away—then instructions were given that no man nor woman should disturb him. No wonder that romantic and adventure-loving Boswell grew passionately fond of the black-eyed beauty. No wonder that, as he lay for hours at her feet, talking tenderly to her in the vernacular, and watching the sunlight dancing on her polished skin, he lost sight of the danger of his position.

He was living among savages, very few of whom had even learned to speak his language, and he was many miles away from the haunts of the white residents of the Coast. Still, he lived a life of ease and luxury, and day by day he was left basking in the sunshine of Sadra's tropical beauty.

Weeks passed by, and the doctor half-forgot his real life and the associations of civilisation. Time is nothing to the native of West Africa. Year in and year out, twelve hours' sunshine is followed by twelve hours' darkness, and the savage life goes on with nothing to mark its progress save the wrinkling of once glossy skins, and the stiffening of limbs that have been lissom as the panther's. This is all the native knows of time, and he hardly thinks of even these things till the end of his strong life approaches.

Karelah grew accustomed to having the white man in his camp, and liked to see him there. It was a fine thing to have a white 'medicine man' residing in one's camp. Whether his visitor had

been, or was to be, with him a week, or a month, or a year, was nothing to the chief, and he never thought of it. Boswell himself soon ceased to count the days; and as Sadra, with native readiness, fell into his ways of talking and thinking, he learned to live solely in and for this strange infatuation of his.

It was easy for the cultivated white man, who spoke her language with more fluency, if less correctness, than she herself—it was easy for this man, who taught her so many strange and beautiful things, to teach her also to love him. He did so. And, with all the force of her half-savage and wholly beautiful nature, she loved and worshipped this visitor from an outer world. He had no intentions, but his vague and dreamy ideas about the girl were all perfectly honourable. So, when Karelah, warned by a tale-bearing slave, came suddenly upon them seated lovingly together, Dr. Keith Boswell said that he wanted to marry Sadra, the chief's daughter. They were sitting together in a small room, during the intense heat of the morning, as they had become accustomed to do. The doctor was telling her over again the old story, of how he had felt his heart go out towards her when he had first seen her in Ajassa, as she had stood in her father's camp with the evening sunshine glowing over her. He had one arm thrown round the beautiful girl's slim waist, and was in the act of kissing her sun-coloured forehead, when Karelah burst into the room. Keith Boswell learned what it was to deal

with the bare savage, with the veneer scraped off, when he rose to face the chief's first mad wrath. He began by saying that it was his wish to marry Sadra, as white men married the women of their love.

'You, marry Sadra!' screamed Karelah in the vernacular. 'Sadra is the bride of a king, not of a white monkey—not of a medicine man who knows not the mangrove from the bread-fruit tree! You, white ape from the North! You may go marry some weak-limbed slave in a mission station! You, snake from fever-stricken swamps! I received you as a guest, and the king's friend. And you, child of a catfish! would rob me of my daughter, the chosen of a king!'

Now, to Keith Boswell, the idea that even Karelah could consider him less than the equal of black King Munyar, seemed absurd. And he said as much.

'Oh, treacherous jungle-cat!' bellowed the chief; 'dog that would "chop" at my table, and sleep on my bed, whilst robbing me, stealing from me my flesh and blood! But you shall go — Yes, out into the swamp before my slaves cut you down here at my feet! As for you, bush-rat!'—here he turned, blazing, to his daughter—'you, I will sell to the Mohammedans, who will carry you as a slave through the desert to their sandy home in the far-away North! You, worm, shall not marry a king; and may Ju-Ju choke me if you shall marry a dog of a white medicine man! Go!'

He thundered out the last word with such prodigious fury, that instinct made the girl drop her lover's arm and walk slowly towards her mother's rooms. Then Keith Boswell, the white doctor, tried to conciliate Karelah, the savage chief, and gain permission to marry his daughter. Karelah spat on the ground in his contemptuous rage.

'Go, slave! go, dog! go, snake! Out of my sight, monkey, before you die! And, when you are gone, cheer yourself, and remember that to-morrow I take Sadra to the Coast. I will show you and her how the chief rules his people! I will sell her to the Mohammedans, and she shall be a slave, and a carrier to the half-breeds!'

Boswell was forced to go. He could gain nothing but death by remaining. And, as he walked out into the glaring sunshine, his heart ached within him; for he knew full well that it was no unusual nor impossible thing for a native to sell his children to the Mohammedan pilgrims, who, combining 'pork and beans with the gospel,' traverse the trackless Sahara on foot, and, having got through their trade and their religious rites of the Coast, return, by the way they came, to Algiers and Moorish Africa. As he walked blindly on through the plane-trees, and over the trailing roots of yams and mangroves, he realised for the first time what an absorbing passion his love for Sadra had become. In the dreamy happiness of his life during the past six or seven weeks he had never seriously contemplated his position, far less

paused to analyse the qualities of that feeling which had made him content to sit for hours at the feet of this perfect beauty of the tropics. Now he realised it all, and he swore, in his own mind, as he stumbled over the swampy ground, that he could not and would not live without her.

He wandered on through the jungle till he came to the river-bank. Then he began to look about him under the overhanging mangrove branches, and to think. Sadra was going to the coast. Ah! He crept quietly about until he found a light, slender canoe that he knew would answer his purpose, and then, using the grotesquely carved paddle with the ease of habit, he shot out into the dazzling brightness of the sunshine, and started on his way down the river towards the Coast.

For a white man, alone, to paddle a canoe down the Ajassa river in the heat of the day, and in the teeth of mangrove flies, miasma, and mosquitoes, is—well, Boswell reached the Coast, because Powell saw him when he arrived, and bought from him the little property he had there, paying him cash for it. The doctor said he was going to leave the Coast, but gave no further particulars.

The next day but one, a large Mohammedan caravan of pilgrims started for the far North; and it was said that Chief Karelah had sold his lovely daughter to the leader of the tribe. When the wanderers were winding their way out of the settlement, Powell saw a man walking in the rear

of the procession, and dressed as an Arab trader. Powell considered the man wonderfully like Dr. Keith Boswell, and hailed him by that name. The Arab trader turned, and held up a brown finger of warning, on which there glittered an unmistakably English ring.

J. L. Powell was a man who never interfered with other folks' affairs, and he stood silent whilst the long procession passed slowly out of sight. Dr. Keith Boswell was never seen in West Africa again, and only one man who knew him in those days has ever seen him since.

When J. L. Powell was wintering in Morocco last year, he wandered somewhat out of the beaten track, and reached an inland village called Tehemut. This place consisted almost entirely of dingy and dilapidated-looking residences, tiny bazaars, and squalid huts. On a stretch of rising ground at the back of the settlement, however, stood a spacious, rambling, one-story building of Moorish architecture, surrounded by tall palm-trees, and all the beauties of sub-tropical vegetation.

'Whose place is that?' asked Powell of his Arab servant.

The man made inquiries, and learned that the building was 'the palace of the Great White Caid from the South, Ben Keitha,' who lived with his queen—'a beautiful goddess, whose skin shines like the sun.'

J. L. Powell smiled, and rode up the hill to the gates of the palace grounds. There he was

stopped by two Fantee slaves from the Coast. He took out a card, and scribbled on the back of it these words: 'J. L. Powell, of the West Coast, would like to see Doctor "Ben Keitha," and talk of old times.'

He was admitted, and escorted to the main hall of that gorgeous white house; but what he saw and heard inside is something he has solemnly sworn never to divulge.

MADGE

'A TIGER, A WOMAN, A HANDFUL OF DUST, AND A DEAD SEA APPLE'

(*A garbled quotation.*)

'Tis a fair world: if dark, indeed, with woe,
Yet having hope and hint of such a joy,
That a man, winning, well might turn aside,
Careless of Heaven. . . .
O enough; I turn
From the sun's light, or haply I shall hope.
I have hoped enough; I would not hope again:
'Tis hope that is most cruel.'

A MINOR POET.

'That moment she was mine, mine fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.'

Porphyria's Lover.

THE MAN

A GOOD deal of it I myself saw; and she told me everything. It is the woman's own story, and if she does not mind it being told, surely no one else has any right to object. Anyhow, I choose to tell it, if only because, the other day, I heard the man referred to as 'an utterly unprincipled rake.' Mind, I do not say he acted very wisely. Perhaps

he acted very foolishly. But the best men in the world are not always the wisest, and the worst are not necessarily those who act unwisely. In the end, perhaps, it is better to have given new lamps for old, than to have given old lamps and taken new—obituary notices to the contrary notwithstanding. We who are men really begin by owing the world a good many new lamps—because we are men. Some recognise it and try to give ; others do not see it, and gather to themselves new lamps and an obituary notice. Perhaps Hugh Marsden thought this way.

Marsden did not step into a ready-made practice when he became a fully fledged solicitor, and during his first year or two in London he had to fight fairly hard, to make any way in his profession at all. True, there was a small annuity standing between himself and actual want ; but he had ambitions, and a measure of success which justified these ambitions.

He had no relatives, or certainly none who knew anything of him ; he had been brought up alone, by a father whose religion had been something he called 'Natural Philosophy' ; and the principles upon which he guided his own life were his own ideals. He did not go into society, and reached the age of thirty without knowing what a woman's love meant. There had been phases in his life, as in the lives of all men, and he had necessarily been brought into contact with women in general. He had never, however, realised the actual existence of woman in particular.

Late one night in the mid-winter of the thirtieth year in his life, Hugh Marsden was obliged to visit a dying client. In the early hours of the morning, when a light sleet was falling, he left his client's house in Bloomsbury, to walk to his own residence in Jermyn Street. Two or three night cabmen wondered why he chose to walk through the sleet, but Marsden himself did not notice it. He had just witnessed the neglected end of an old man's lonely life; and the solitude of it all had impressed and oppressed him.

Approaching Jermyn Street, in Regent Street, Marsden paused in the middle of the pavement to listen to a moaning sound which seemed to proceed from the porch of a church he was passing. He walked then to the front of the church and saw the figure of a woman lying on the steps. The solicitor bent down over this figure and asked if he could be of any assistance. The woman's face turned towards him as she muttered a reply, the words of which he could not catch; and the man saw that she was very young, very ill, and very pretty. But she appealed to him then, simply and solely as some one—an individual—in distress. A man would have appealed to him in the same way. He had never known woman in particular.

'Will you try and walk with me,' he said, as he bent over her, 'to some place where I can get help for you?'

The woman gazed at him; murmured one word, and then fainted. The one word she uttered was 'No!'

Marsden stood a minute looking down somewhat abstractedly at the figure prostrate on the wet, slippery steps. No one passed by while he stood there; and his mind casually absorbed the fact that the woman was well and tastefully dressed, despite her present forlorn condition. Then an unusually cold gust of wind caused him to realise that help was needed here, and, stooping without further reflection, he lifted the insensible figure in his arms and walked to the corner of Jermyn Street.

No cab was there, and Marsden walked on with his burden as calmly as though he had been carrying a brief-bag instead of a woman. A few minutes afterwards he saw, through the driving sleet, a hansom, approaching him at a foot pace. He hailed the cabman, and as he did so the woman, regaining consciousness for a moment, said, 'No, I won't'; and again became insensible. The solicitor looked round then, and saw that he was standing outside his own door. For a few moments he stood pondering, in hesitancy which had nothing whatever to do with the sex of the figure he supported in his arms.

'Well, I don't know,' he muttered; whilst the cabman sat gazing at him impatiently. 'I don't know where else to take her. Yes, I think I will.' He raised his voice, as, disengaging one wet hand from his companion, he gave a shilling to the cabman. 'All right, cabby! I won't bother you to-night.'

Then, propping the unconscious girl against the iron railings with one arm, he opened the door

with his latch-key, closing it behind him after carrying the girl into the hall within. The house was a small one, and, with the exception of a basement office, Marsden rented the whole of it, using one floor for his offices and one for his living purposes, whilst the third was occupied by his housekeeper, a middle-aged woman with two obvious and exaggerated peculiarities—ugliness and kindliness.

A fire was burning in the solicitor's inner office, and on the hearthrug before it he laid the woman he had carried in his arms from Regent Street. He carefully adjusted a cushion under her head, and then, walking quietly out of the room, proceeded to the upper floor of the building and roused his housekeeper.

Mrs. Roberts showed no bad temper at having been roused at that hour, and within five minutes of the time of her arrival in the downstairs office, her employer's patient had regained consciousness. The housekeeper asked no questions, and moved about with the air of one who knows what is wanted, and how to supply those wants. Her look and every movement seemed to say, 'For the present there are things to be done. Time enough afterwards to ascertain particulars.'

In half an hour a fire was lighted in the spare room on the floor occupied by the housekeeper, and everything was prepared for its immediate use. Then good-hearted, ugly Mrs. Roberts walked to the office couch, on which the patient, who had not yet spoken, was lying, and said

quietly, 'Now, miss, do you think you can manage to get upstairs? Come, let me help you.'

The girl on the couch raised herself weakly on one elbow, and looked round the room with dazed, wondering eyes, of liquid, childish blue. Mrs. Roberts had loosed the neck of the girl's gown, and now her long, silky hair, glistening still with the cold moisture of the outer night, tumbled in heavy waves round the slim, white throat. At that moment, Marsden, who stood by the fire watching, suddenly realised the situation; recognised for the first time woman in particular—this woman whom he had picked up from the steps of a Regent Street church and carried into his house. The man felt all through him the contact of a feminine individuality, and for the moment he could say nothing.

The girl stared at the housekeeper, and then at the man.

'You helped me,' said she to Marsden. 'I told you not to. Where is this? Where have you taken me? I don't know you—do I?'

In these two last words, the girl opened the covers of her life and showed the title-page of her history; and she knew that the man read and realised, though the housekeeper did not.

'This is my house,' said the solicitor, 'and I brought you here because I didn't know where else to take you. I couldn't leave you outside in the sleet, and you—were very ill.'

'And now—now you know better, and would like me to go? Well, I 'll go.' The girl rose to

her feet and would have fallen, but Mrs. Roberts was in the way, with open arms and clumsy, kindly hands.

'There, there, don't you try your strength too much, pretty.'

Marsden's face flushed at this, and stepping forward he said:

'Believe me, I don't want you to go. Mrs. Roberts has made a room ready for you upstairs, and you—you're not fit to go out, you know. You had better stay, and I—er—and let Mrs. Roberts look after you.'

The childish blue eyes slowly filled with tears, but weary resistance was in the girl's tone as she said, 'I don't want to be looked after. I am—oh!——' The tired little spirit gave out at last, and the relapse of utter languor seemed to spread over the girl's form as she rested her weight in the arms of the housekeeper. She became simply passive weakness, and in another few minutes was alone with Mrs. Roberts in the room upstairs.

Marsden sat smoking and listening, till all was silent in the little house. Then he sighed and walked softly to his own room. Then he smiled and went to bed; having left a note outside his door instructing Mrs. Roberts to send for a doctor as soon as she came down.

Marsden was sitting at breakfast when the doctor arrived, and, calling the medical man into his own room, he explained his manner of meeting with the patient upstairs.

'You may think it odd, doctor,' he said; 'but I

want my housekeeper to take care of the girl, until she's fit to take care of herself, and——'

'Quite so,' said the doctor sententiously. He was a young man of small practice and expensive tastes. He permitted himself to smile tentatively and very slightly. Marsden ooked cold seriousness, and the doctor was escorted upstairs by Mrs. Roberts.

'The—er—girl is suffering from no specific complaint,' he said to Marsden on his way downstairs. 'She is simply worn out and exhausted. I should say she has been living—er—very carelessly, and taking next to no nourishment. She wants careful nursing, perfect rest, and plenty of nutriment —er—that's all.'

'Ah, thank you, doctor.' Marsden held out his hand with a fee in it, and said he would send a message if another visit seemed necessary. So the doctor left, smiling to himself as he walked down the street.

During the day Marsden attended to his affairs as usual, making several inquiries of Mrs. Roberts as to the progress of the girl upstairs. At four o'clock in the afternoon he sent up to ask permission to come and see her.

The girl opened her blue eyes very widely and said, 'Tell him to come.'

So Mrs. Roberts brought her master into the room, placed a chair for him by the bedside, and went about her duties elsewhere.

'How are you to-day?' began the solicitor somewhat formally. Then, without waiting for an

answer, he said, 'By the way, my name is Marsden —Hugh Marsden. Will you tell me what I may call you?'

The girl smiled, and looked half-banteringly at Marsden. As she looked, the quiet courtesy in the man's face seemed to strike her, and her smile dying away, left only wonder in the fair face, with its strange blended look of childish freshness and weary womanhood.

'You may call me Madge,' she said. 'At least that's my name, but you may call me—anything. I've been called "Baby" and "Sweetheart," and half a dozen names.' She smiled again, and Marsden made a mental note to the effect that the smile was weary, whilst the serious wonder was only wonder. As such, he preferred it to the smile.

'Why did you bring me here?' she asked, after a pause.

'I believe I brought you here because it was the only place I could think of, and you were ill.'

'And why do you keep me here? Don't you see that I——'

Marsden interrupted hurriedly: 'I shall keep you, if you let me, because you are not fit to go about, and take care of yourself; and you—in fact, that, I think, is why I keep you here.'

The girl Madge began a little laugh, and catching her breath midway turned the laugh into a sigh. Marsden's head was bent, and they remained silent for a while, both wondering. The girl wondered as to the man's aims, reasons, and

motives. And it was about these same things that Marsden wondered.

THE GIRL

Day succeeded day, and the ordinary life of the little house in Jermyn Street was unchanged and undisturbed. The young doctor was not again called in, because perfect rest and careful nursing were doing for Madge all that her condition required. Every day her blue eyes grew a little softer and more sunny; each morning her skin seemed more fresh and more velvety. On the tenth day Marsden heard her laugh, and decided mentally that the sound of her laugh was very musical. Her smile, too, ceased to be weary, and became a sweeter thing to see than was her look of serious wonder.

'She is getting better,' said Mrs. Roberts meaningly. 'What are you going to do, sir?'

Marsden sent Madge out for a drive with Mrs. Roberts in his private hansom. Then he sat down to think. Now, the solicitor's housekeeper was a native of Aberdeen, and her early training and life's beliefs in matters moral and religious had been, and were, severe. Days before this first outing of the patient, Marsden had learned her story piece by piece. So, with reservations, had Mrs. Roberts. He knew that four months previously, when Madge had lived with her mother in a little south-coast village, she had run away from home with a youth of the type yclept

'gilded.' He had shown his gold by marrying her, and his gilding by leaving her a week afterwards without a shilling in the world. This was strange, but it was true, and the gilded youth was in India with his regiment when Marsden found Madge. The girl showed Marsden as much of her marriage lines as was possible without disclosing the name of the irresponsible idiot who had married her. That also was strange, thought the solicitor, and for this he almost loved the girl with baby eyes; though he saw, without her telling him, what her life had been since the week of wifehood. But this was his first contact with woman in particular, and he had nursed Madge.

By the time Mrs. Roberts and her charge returned from their drive, the solicitor had decided upon a definite course of action. He decided to do nothing, and the carrying out of this decision puzzled and troubled his housekeeper, who looked stern and severe when sitting alone in her room, and loving and pitiful whilst tending the girl whose eyes were like two windows to a pure child's heart.

Marsden read Shelley and Browning[1] to Madge; and when he stroked her white forehead in his thoughtful, serious way, before leaving her, she would walk to the mirror by the window of her room, and smile prettily at her own face reflected there. Once he kissed this smooth forehead of hers. And that night she would not let the house-

[1] I had it from Marsden, that, in this particular connection, the girl's favourite poems were 'In a Gondola,' and 'A Toccata of Galuppi's.'

keeper come into her room. She dropped off to sleep with the book he had been reading, lying on her white breast.

Then Marsden was called to Manchester on business, and was obliged to tell Madge that he would be away for two days.

'Oh, then I am to go now,' she said, smiling quietly. And the sunny brightness faded out of her eyes, whilst they seemed to look inwards wearily.

When Marsden said, 'Why, no, child! Wait till I come back,' she sighed happily, and the baby eyes grew sunny again.

Marsden went to Manchester, and in course of conversation with his client there, addressed that gentleman as 'Little one!'

On the third afternoon he returned to the house in Jermyn Street; and Mrs. Roberts told him that Madge had gone out on the previous evening and had not returned.

'Oh!' said the solicitor. 'I see—she has not come back? Very well, Mrs. Roberts, I—you can bring me some coffee, if you please.'

And Marsden sat down before the fire in his inner office and filled his pipe. Some time afterwards the solicitor walked into his sitting-room, and found Mrs. Roberts laying dinner there for him.

'Why did—she go, Mrs. Roberts?'

Marsden wheeled round from the place he had taken by the window, and faced his housekeeper, whose uneven face was very stern, its sadness showing only in the keen grey eyes.

'I cannot rightly understand, sir,' she said

slowly, smoothing creases out of the white table-cloth as she spoke.

'Did she leave no message?' asked the man, turning again to the window, which overlooked a mews.

'No, sir—not to say exactly any message.'

'Well?'

'Well, sir, last evening I laid a nice dinner for us both in my sitting-room, as you told me to. Then I went downstairs for a few minutes to see to locking up and lighting the hall.' Mrs. Roberts spoke jerkily, arranging her master's knives the while, and as though under protest. 'When I went upstairs again, Miss Madge was hurrying about her room, dressing herself in the things she sent for last week.'

'"I am going out, Mrs. Roberts," she said. I asked why she would go out at that time, and she still weak and shaky.

'"I 'm hungry, Mrs. Roberts," she said, "and I must go."'

'"Well, but dear bless you," said I, "there 's our dinner laid in the next room. To be sure you 're hungry, and you 're going to enjoy your dinner."'

'"No, no," says Miss Madge, and she put her hands on my shoulders. "I don't mean dinner. I know you won't understand, Mrs. Roberts—I don't myself—but I 'm hungry for the lights, and music, and—perhaps if he——There, I must go, Mrs. Roberts."'

The housekeeper paused, and again Marsden,

this time without turning from the window, said, 'Well?'

'Well, sir, I talked and persuaded, and I might have saved my breath. When she'd her light cloak on, she walked downstairs, and I followed her. Her eyes was like two diamonds, sir, and her cheeks was like the cheeks of the girls who carry fish up yonder at my home. She listened to all I said about her illness, and she looked as though she thought it all true; but she only said, "Mrs. Roberts, I'm hungry. You won't understand; but I must go, or I shall choke."'

'And then?' said the man by the window, questioningly, but without turning round.

'Then she—she went outside, sir.'

'Oh, she—went outside!' Marsden stood silent for a few minutes, whilst his housekeeper moved slowly about the dinner-table, smoothing and arranging. At last Marsden turned round, and his face seemed to say that his mind was made up.

'You might bring me my ulster, Mrs. Roberts: I see there's snow outside.'

'But you're never going out, sir—such a night as it is, and dinner ready too!'

'Yes, you needn't keep dinner, Mrs. Roberts. I'm not hungry, and—I must go out.'

It was four days afterwards that Marsden's Manchester client came up to town; and on the following evening the two men arranged to dine together and go to a theatre. Marsden knew rather less about the evening life of the metropolis

than did his provincial guest; and when supper was proposed after the theatre, the solicitor suggested his own home as the best place for that purpose.

'No, come with me to the Regency Rooms,' said Marsden's friend. And the solicitor, feeling very cold indifference, agreed readily, whilst confessing ignorance as to the whereabouts of the famous supper-hall. The night life of London was really almost a sealed book to him, and he gazed curiously about as his friend walked before him down the brilliantly lighted corridor leading into the Regency supper-rooms. A waiter opened the swinging doors of the main hall, and the two men stepped into an atmosphere of wine and laughter, perfumed silks, bright lights, and music.

Marsden's friend saw a big, richly coloured picture, familiar to him by recollection and association—a sea of faces, some flushed and bright, some cold and weary, some strange, and some known to him. Marsden saw one square table, three figures, and one woman. This little table was in the middle of the big room; it was occupied by two men and two women; and it was the centre of attraction by reason of the sound of their laughter, which drowned the music, and of the fairness of one of the two women. When Marsden entered, this woman had risen to her feet, and stood leaning over the little table, her champagne-glass poised in mid-air, as she laughingly demanded a clink of the glass of her *vis-à-vis*. Her fair face was flushed, and her big, baby eyes sparkled and danced with excitement.

This was Madge; and as Marsden entered the room, their eyes met over the heads of a score of men and women, in an instant flash of recognition. On the first night of their meeting weeks before, Madge had in two simple words unintentionally shown the man the title-page of her history. Now, in one unexpected instant, she laid before him the open pages of her frailty's private diary.

Marsden laid a cold hand on his friend's shoulder, and, turning without speaking, walked out of the great hall and down the long corridor leading to the street. Passing between two great mirrors, he stepped aside to make way for a haggard-looking man, who, with set features and head bent low, was approaching him. He was not thinking, but a flash of pity and no shadow of recognition passed through the man's mind, as in this way he met his own reflection.

Curious meetings, episodes, and incidents are the rule at the Regency supper-rooms; and no one noticed this queer little comedy.

As Marsden left the room, Madge's brimming wine-glass shivered and snapped in mid-air, falling with a crash on the little square table. A deft-handed waiter whisked the *débris* out of sight. Those whose faces were flushed laughed aloud; the cold ones smiled knowingly; and no one noticed, when Madge's fair head was raised after bending over the table, either the tears standing in her eyes or the spots of blood which fell from her fingers on to the white cloth. Such things do not count at the Regency.

Marsden's friend supped alone that night, and in the morning, while the solicitor sat in his inner office at Jermyn Street, a boy knocked at the door and handed him two telegrams. One was from the Manchester client, and said, 'Please meet me two o'clock at club. Hinton.' The other read thus: 'Marsden, Jermyn Street. "Come to me, Beloved, or I die." Madge.' Marsden had read poetry to the girl with baby eyes, and she had her favourite lines.

The solicitor had quaint ideas regarding the responsibilities of men as men, and the debt to the world and to women, which they handed on from generation to generation. And then this episode had been his first actual contact with woman in particular. That portion of what he had seen in the Regency Rooms which caused him regret was something for which he considered himself, by virtue of his sex, more or less personally responsible. He would certainly go to the girl with sunny eyes since she sent for him. Then, picking up the telegram a second time, he saw that no address of sender was given, beyond the name of a metropolitan telegraph office. So he promptly wrote out and despatched a message to that office, in which he said, 'Come to me, or tell me where to find you, and I will come at once.'

Later came a reply telegram, 'Café Ronda—five o'clock.' So Marsden was able to keep his appointment with the Manchester client; and when, at half-past four, he was leaving Jermyn

Street on his way to the Café Ronda, he said to Mrs. Roberts:

'I think—Miss Madge will come—will have to return here this evening. She—is ill again. See that there are fires ready in your rooms upstairs, will you, please?'

The housekeeper's thin, uncompromising lips moved as though she were about to speak. Then the grey eyes grew moist, seeming to set a seal of tenderness upon her lips, as the woman in her peered into the solicitor's weary face. So her head bent and she said nothing.

Marsden met Madge in the vestibule of the Café Ronda; and as he took her little hand in his she shivered from head to foot.

'Don't take me in here,' she murmured, glancing towards the glass doors of the café. 'Take me somewhere where I can sit down—away from people—and—forgive me. Talk to me like you did before.'

The girl was very weak and trembled violently, so that Marsden was half-afraid of her fainting, there in the public lobby. His own hansom was waiting outside, and so, very carefully, he led the girl to it and helped her in. Then he told his man to drive through the park. He did not ask the girl why she had left his house, but he looked sadly and regretfully at the white face in the corner of the cab.

Her great childish eyes turned towards him full of tears and pleading. 'Please—please don't look at me like that! Indeed I could not help it; and —it hurts so now.

Marsden passed his hand caressingly over her forehead. She was very ill and weak, and she seemed dearer to him a good deal because of that—this girl who was wife, widow, child, and woman ; and yet none of these.

'Child,' he said, 'I am only sorry because it hurts, and you are ill.'

Then he looked out of the cab windows into the sleet and mud of the London winter evening.

'Little one, will you let me drive you to my house and try to make you well again?'

The woman, utterly exhausted, in pain and sadness, gave way; and the child clung to Marsden's shoulder with both her little hot hands.

'Will you?' she murmured, half-incredulous. 'Oh, Dear, Dear—but I know you must think—you don't know really. I could not help it.'

Then the little head, with its halo of soft gold hair, sank down on to the man's shoulder, and weak weariness sighed itself away into unconsciousness. So it happened that when, for the second time, Marsden brought Madge to the little house in Jermyn Street, he had a second time to carry her upstairs and leave her to his housekeeper, whose arms were stretched out yearningly towards the child, whilst her plain face was set in unforgiving sternness.

The doctor was sent for again that night, but his report was as before.

'Simply and purely a case of overtaxed strength, Mr. Marsden. I should say the patient's life was one of—er—phases. A period of intense strain,

nervous and—er—physical, followed by a reactionary relapse. I can only advise rest and nourishment, and—er—if I may say so, careful watching in about, say, three weeks from now. The patient seems to me to be—er—an abnormally nervous and emotional subject.'

Mrs. Roberts did not leave her charge till late that evening, when Madge was sleeping restfully in childish oblivion to all her surroundings. Then the Scotchwoman, choking down all the Puritan in herself, bade her master come upstairs to see the patient. Together they crept on tip-toe into the little room where Madge lay, with one white, rounded arm half-buried in her golden curls, her little lips just parted like a child's, and her breast rising and falling in even, restful breathing. Marsden looked very tenderly at the sleeping girl; and, as he looked, the drawn, haggard lines which had crept over his face during the last week seemed to smooth themselves out, leaving calm and content in their place. The housekeeper was watching him, and she nodded and sighed quietly to herself as she noticed the change.

Then the solicitor went down to his own rooms to write a little, and think more, before lying down to sleep—as he had not slept for a week. The man felt a sense of rest and relief so soothing as to greatly surprise himself. A dozen times he smiled confidentially over his pipe, and muttered to himself as men who live alone are apt to do.

At last he walked quietly to his bedroom, and standing there before his dressing-table he said,

'She 's not a wife, and she 's not a widow';—then he smiled a little bitterly—'the world would say she 's certainly not a maid, and cannot marry. I don't think the world is anything to me, and I do think she is a maid to me. Little Madge, I think I love you,—Regency and the world notwithstanding. Good night, little girl!'

And the man of law looked meditatively up at the ceiling above him, beyond which he knew the girl lay sleeping. Then, slowly, he undressed and went to bed.

For a week Madge did not stir out of the little house in Jermyn Street; and the housekeeper was all motherhood and quiet solicitude.

Madge sat by the fire, or lay in the little white bed, breathing rest; drawing into herself great draughts of sweetness; and exuding girlish pathos, which melted and softened Mrs. Roberts, sometimes filling her grey eyes with tears. Then, as the girl's lips grew more like twin rosebuds, she purred tenderness, half a child's and half a woman's, in place of simple pathos.

At Marsden's request, Mrs. Roberts drove out with her in the afternoons. Madge would return to the Jermyn Street house softly flushed, and sighing happy anticipation of the evening, when Marsden read and talked to her. Then the housekeeper's face grew harder and more stern, and she would quietly force away the soft arms which at times were laid on her neck in childish fondness. At this, the girl's eyes would open wide in pained astonishment, and as they filled with tears, the housekeeper's thin lips would twitch, and her

two bony hands would draw the child tenderly towards her, whilst her own head was turned away.

'Child, child,' she would say half-querulously, 'do you never want to go to your own mother again?'

And Madge would answer that she could not —that her mother would not have her, now.

THE MADNESS

Almost a month had passed since Madge had left the house on the night of Marsden's absence in Manchester. She had been out with Mrs. Roberts all the afternoon; and half an hour after her return, Marsden, sitting in his den downstairs, heard a knock at his door.

'Come in, Jordan,' said the solicitor, expecting to see his office-boy.

There was a little rustling sound, and, looking up suddenly, Marsden found Madge standing at his side.

'Why, little one, what's the matter?' he said. And as he rose, taking her hands in his own, he saw that her fair face was flushed, her eyes sparkling, and her breast heaving as though she were on the point of sobbing. It was all childish, and yet—something in Madge's face made Marsden's very heart turn cold with dread.

'Child, you're not well. Sit down,' he said, stepping past her to close the door of his den.

The girl turned sharply round and faced him as she said, 'How did you know? No, no, I am well, but——'

She paused, catching her breath uneasily in nervous excitement. Marsden, gazing fixedly into the blue eyes, saw all their glitter, but thought the sunny light had gone from them. He walked to her side and raised one hand caressingly to her shoulder. The man's whole heart was in his finger-tips then, and in his voice there seemed more of a mother's love than a man's passion, as he said, 'Madge, dear, what is wrong?'

The girl's breast rose and fell in sobbing breaths, but no tears came to her eyes.

'Oh, you dear Hugh'—she seemed to throw the words from her with pain in each—'I love you, I love you, but I am——You will never understand. I am not fit to love you. I am going out—away—and you must forget me. I cannot help it.'

'There, little girl! Hush!' He was stroking her soft hair with one not very steady hand. 'Don't talk about going away. Something has upset you—something Mrs. Roberts has said, perhaps.'

'Oh, no, no, no!' Madge interrupted, drawing herself away from Marsden. 'She is too good—like you. I cannot tell why, only I must go. I —I am hungry. I want the lights and the clatter, and—oh, I must go!'

There was that about these last three words which absolutely forbade persuasion, admitted of no question, and made the bare idea of remonstrance indecent. Madge, breathless, panting, and flushed, stood facing the man who loved her, and whom she had said she loved. The moment was

psychological. The woman knew it. The man did not. And the next move was the man's.

Marsden was chilled from head to foot by something which made him shiver as he stood thinking. Then he raised his head, and there was purpose in his white face, and a good deal of love.

'Very well, dear, if you must go—outside; if you are hungry,—then you shall go. But not alone—not alone, little girl!'

The girl's two arms fell limply at her side. Woman and child, angel and devil, purity and madness; all seemed to be fighting in her breast; whilst she herself—aside, relapsed—was waiting.

Marsden drew a long breath of relief, feeling himself and his happiness being weighed in the scale against her hunger, and believing that the hunger would be found wanting. The girl's arms straightened rigidly, and she tried to speak. She only panted, gazing full into Marsden's face. But he did not even raise his head, fearing almost to breathe, lest his breathing should be on the wrong side of the balance. It was the man's first contact with woman in particular.

Madge breathed heavily, but without speaking. Then her arms fell limply again, and her voice rather than herself said, 'Come, then!' The voice grew stronger. 'Come with me, for—I must go.'

Marsden turned from her, and his heart, throbbing nervously, seemed to send great waves of coldness all through him—still coldness, which made his whole frame stiff and numbed.

An hour afterwards Mrs. Roberts stood stern

and dry-eyed, in the room where Madge had slept. It was night, but the woman, moving about the while with the same set, forbidding look on her face, swept the room, took the bed to pieces, opened the windows, and placed all the little oddments, which told of a woman's occupapation, together in one box. Afterwards she closed the windows, locked the door, and, sitting in her own room, knitted furiously till her eyes ached and smarted. Then she sat stiff and upright gazing into the fire, her thin hands lying palms uppermost in her lap.

Madge and the solicitor dined at a fashionable restaurant, driving together afterwards to a theatre. For an hour, Madge, who in her changed state seemed to the solicitor taller and larger, sat watching a great actress personating Shakespeare's Juliet. The actress personated, but the artist in her was, Juliet—the Italian girl budding at Love's bidding into womanhood. Marsden was enthralled, and for a little while Madge leaned back in her chair soothed and enchanted.

Then the spell seemed to yield, and Marsden saw the girl's breast rising and her face flushing. Her hands moved restlessly, and when the curtain fell at the end of the second act, Madge begged for change and a move. Marsden could not bear to see the nervous hunger in her eyes, and, when they took seats in a great music-hall, he thought the noise and glitter of the place might content her for a while. Of the ballet Madge soon tired, and yet another move was made.

The furious tenseness of a great dancer's singing and dancing at this latter place won much applause from the girl whose baby eyes had made Marsden wish he had led a stricter life. And after this: 'The Regency Rooms,' ejaculated Madge gleefully, as the solicitor helped her into a hansom outside.

The man thought of his last visit to the Regency and shivered, whilst the girl's clear laughter still rang in his ears. Waiting longingly, chilled and watchful, the man tried to laugh with her; and her excitement closed her ears to the cold flatness of his voice.

Bows and laughing acknowledgments of bows; music and clattering applause; dazzling lights; clinking glasses constantly replenished; scented tapers twinkling; glancing shoulders, bright eyes, wet lips, hot hands, and every nerve tinkling at concert pitch. Then a hurried break; a momentary pause for breathing and the putting on of cloaks; and Marsden took his seat with Madge in a hansom outside the Regency Rooms.

'And now?' whispered the man, looking in vain for a sign of weariness in Madge's flushed face and sparkling eyes.

'Now?' she replied, laughing as she spoke—'Oh, tell him to drive to The Troubadours in Varney Square; we can dance there.'

Everywhere men and women smiled on the fair girl, anxious to renew or make her acquaintance. Everywhere men and women, but more especially the latter, gazed curiously at the cold, reserved

man who danced with Madge, and drank with her, and sat with her; growing colder and more weary with every glass of wine he drank; waiting and watching anxiously whilst his companion's eyes grew brighter.

Place after place they visited, and at the door of each the porter's obsequious recognition of Madge's girlish beauty seemed to add lines and a year to the solicitor's haggard face. In the supper-room of one establishment, a splendid-looking Spanish woman, in the prime of her matured beauty, paused in front of Marsden, who for the moment was standing alone, and bowed with bantering deference as she raised a wine-glass to her lips.

Her eyes were very glassy, and her voice a little hoarse as she said, 'Well, señor, you look lonely. Now, what 's your opinion of it all?'

Marsden looked wearily round the crowded room. 'It makes me very tired,' he said; with half a laugh, and half a groan.

'Ah! Well, I confess I think it 's rather too ridiculous, myself; but you—why don't you go away?'

Marsden caught a glimpse of Madge's golden hair, as she passed into the ballroom hanging on the arm of a very emasculated specimen of the gilded youth. He sighed, and replied simply, 'I am waiting.'

'Oh!' The Southern woman glanced meaningly towards the ballroom, and her full red lips curled scornfully, and yet a little pityingly. 'I

thought you were wiser than that. Caballero, you may wait. Holy Mother help you! But, believe me, you will die first. Ah, Bertie, here at last! Come along. Good night, Caballero!'

For a moment the woman's black eyes flashed clear and brilliant, as she looked over the straw-coloured head of the youth she called Bertie, and wished the man 'Good night.'

The solicitor plunged his cold hands into his pockets and smiled bitterly, as he turned to look for Madge. She had finished her dance, and almost fell into Marsden's arms as he led her to a settee.

'Oh, let's go away from here,' she said breathlessly. 'Take me to the Carte Blanche; it's splendid fun there, and I——Come along!'

Hardly waiting to take her cloak from an attendant, Madge hurried feverishly down the wide staircase and into the entrance-hall, where Marsden saw standing the Spanish woman with the straw-coloured youth.

'Still waiting,' murmured the Southern beauty, as she passed Marsden. 'Poor Caballero!' And then she laughed aloud as she despatched her admirer upstairs to look for her fan.

Ten seconds afterwards, panting still with nervous excitement, Madge, followed by the solicitor, reached the entrance at the end of the hall. The porter bowed low as he swung the big door open; and a flood of cold, morning greyness rose up before the girl's bright eyes. She had not thought of the approach of daylight, and

Marsden saw her whole frame shiver as she drew back for an instant in the doorway. Then she took the solicitor's arm, and clung heavily to him as he helped her into a cab.

'Where is it?' asked Marsden, his voice startling himself, so hollow and weary it sounded.

'The Carte Blanche. He will know,' said Madge faintly. A drizzling rain was falling, and as they turned out of the narrow street of the house they had just left, another wave of ghostly grey light, clearer and colder than the first, seemed to fill the cab with its pitiless, grim reality.

'Oh, oh!' Madge put her two gloved hands over her face, the flush on which had given place to paleness now. A look of longing expectancy flashed out of Marsden's eyes, and even brought a little colour to his drawn face, as he leaned towards the girl.

'What is it, little Madge?' he asked her eagerly.

'Oh, it is horrible!' The fair head bent and bent, and rested at last on Marsden's shoulder. 'Please—oh, take me away, out of all this! Take me back to the quiet, clean life! Please—Hugh—quickly!'

'My Madge! Of course I will. You are ill, little one; now you will come to me again.'

Her grey hour had come; and the man who all through the weary night had watched and waited, cold, aching, and wretched—the time of his waiting was ended now. The madness had gone from Madge, and she had come back to him. He gave a great sigh of relief and exhaustion, and

when he turned his head after giving new directions to the cabman, he found Nature had begun to demand her penalty for excessive tension. Madge was icy cold and insensible.

Marsden folded his ulster round her slight form, and afterwards lifted her from the cab to the hall of the house in Jermyn Street. She recovered consciousness in the solicitor's little sitting-room; and the man crept upstairs then, and softly opened the door of the room Madge had occupied. He frowned when he saw its condition, and looked half-hesitatingly towards the door of the room in which he thought his housekeeper was sleeping. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Roberts was sitting upright and fast asleep at that moment, before her sitting-room fire, where she had waited and watched all through the night. Even now her face was set and more severe than ever, though for almost an hour she had been sleeping.

Marsden walked quietly downstairs again, and, glancing into his own bedroom, saw that a bright fire was burning there. For a moment he hesitated. And then he went into his den, where Madge sat.

'Come, little one,' he said very gently, and helping her to rise.

Madge looked steadily at him for a moment, and then lowered her eyes as he stroked her hair tenderly. Bending forward he said quietly, 'Poor little girl! Poor little tired, lonely girl!'

Not very long afterwards Mrs. Roberts was astir about the house. But she found that her master

was before her. She saw that he had had his bath, and was sitting in his den writing letters. Later on, she found that the room next her own had been opened since she locked it up. Then she saw that the solicitor's own room was occupied by Madge. She crept on tip-toe to the bedside, and looked down sternly at the sleeping girl. Then, gradually, she saw the change that had come over Madge's face—how pale it was, and how utterly worn-out the girl appeared. She turned and walked out of the room, muttering to herself as she closed the door:

'That's what I 've done; and what am I but a stuck-up, interfering old woman that ought to have known better? I took the bed away from her, poor motherless bairn that she is. God forgive me; it 'll serve me well right when the master sends me about my business. And he gives up his own room to her; and—I wonder what I 've done!'

An hour afterwards, Marsden knocked softly at the door of his bedroom, and, hearing no sound, walked in to see if Madge was still sleeping. He found the bed smooth and unoccupied, and the room tidied for the day. Hearing Mrs. Roberts moving about in the room above, he walked upstairs in time to see his housekeeper closing the door of the room which had been Madge's.

'You can use your own room now, sir,' said Mrs. Roberts. 'And you 'll forgive me, sir'—she touched his arm with one hand—'I did it for the best. Poor child, she 's sleeping and comfortable in her own room now, and a nice fire burning there.'

Marsden, astonished, stared for a moment as he realised all that this meant. Then he nodded and walked downstairs to resume his letter-writing.

'Hanged if I didn't think the dear old Puritan would have given me notice this morning,' he muttered, as he closed the door of his den.

Hugh Marsden wrote a great deal during the day, and interviewed several clients; for he was a hard worker at that time. Still, he found time to think even more than he worked, and his thoughts were of the girl lying upstairs in the room next the housekeeper's.

All day long he seemed to see her blue eyes gazing at him; sometimes with laughing, baby innocence, sometimes with the feverish brightness of the previous evening, and sometimes with the frightened look of horror of that morning's grey hour. He did not attempt now to disguise from himself the fact that he loved the girl, and this made him ponder the more anxiously over all the strange phases of her complex nature, and her stranger position in the world as a woman. The ethics of conventionality were simply nothing to the man, but that which for himself he did not value highly—the world's respect—he yet wanted for this child-woman with her phases of demi-monde hunger. He loved her; and she was his first experience of woman in particular. The more he thought of the madness which came over her, the more puzzled was he, and the more determined, whether she hated or loved him for it, to save her from herself.

'I can,' he muttered, between puffs of his brier pipe, as he contrasted the hunger which had come upon her while he was in Manchester with that of the previous evening. 'One day brought the end this time, and she had lived through a week of it before I met her at the Café Ronda.'

So he reasoned to himself; and rugged, ugly Mrs. Roberts, battling bravely with the instincts of Puritanism which set her face in such hard lines, vowed in her heart she would help him, or at least remain staunch to him in success or failure. With tears streaming down her face this woman kneeled at her bedside, and prayed to the God of her forebears to pardon her if she did wrong; for the effect upon her of one glance from the eyes of baby blue, was stronger than were the instincts of centuries and the beliefs of a lifetime. Mrs. Roberts had no notion of what the previous evening had been to Madge and Marsden.

Days passed, and Marsden gradually thought less and less of the night of Madge's hunger. In a week that night was to the girl herself a thing of the buried past—the other life—and her sweetness, as she budded and blossomed tenderly in the life Marsden made her love, was a thing beautiful and enthralling. There was no happier man in England than Hugh Marsden; and into the sunshine of the girl's life there crept no sign of shadow.

Then came a day when her fair face was clouded, and the whole house seemed charged with an atmosphere of restless trouble. The housekeeper's face grew more stern and her eyes

more red, as the day wore on. Twice in the morning she boxed the ears of the boy who did her errands; and a dozen times in the day she knelt down in her room and prayed with passionate fervour.

Just before six in the evening Marsden came home after a long day in a provincial court. He brought some flowers for Madge, and called to her to come and see them.

'Here, little girl,' he said; 'here's violets bluer than your big eyes, and lilies whiter than——Oh, my little Madge, what's the matter?'

He knew without asking; and half an hour afterwards, he had to choose between going out with her or allowing her to leave the house alone. All the madness of the hunger for lurid lights was upon her, and there was no choice for him.

Mrs. Roberts dressed Madge, moving about her with red eyes made sightless by the tears which ran from them. There was a grotesque pathos about that ceremony, which to the Scotchwoman had all the real tragedy of the decking-out of a human sacrifice to a heathen deity.

Marsden smiled more sadly than a man sighs, as he muttered whilst looking from his bedroom window at the new moon rising:

'Almost a month, and the same time before. God! are the sailors' stories of moon-change madness true, I wonder!'

They did not return to the house in Jermyn Street by the grey light of dawning, but in the cold sunshine of late afternoon; and Marsden's

face was then a study, in neutral tints, of haggard suffering.

THE SURVIVAL

The history of the next year in the solicitor's life can never be clearly understood, and I am no historian, though all that happened is known to me. He could not forget, but he hoped and hoped, remembering only occasionally what the Spanish woman had said, and thinking always of his own resolve. Madge could forget and become absolutely oblivious. Three days brought baby innocence and dancing sunlight back to her blue eyes; and a week of the Jermyn Street life brought rosy freshness fragrant as dew-splashed heliotrope.

Mrs. Roberts grew sadder and sterner to the world; more rigorous and unforgiving to herself; more tender and patient to the girl who seemed never a woman, save in the sweetness of her love for Marsden. Marsden grew worn and haggard-looking, even in his happiness. Madge grew more lovable and dainty with every day that passed. Yet so surely as the moon changed every month that year, so did Madge's madness come to her; and so did Hugh Marsden turn to cold stone in sharing it with her. Yet Marsden hoped and hoped, though each period of madness was longer than the last—the grey hour was slower in coming—the hunger harder to appease. Then came a Christmas Eve in Marsden's life which every one remembers.

For three wild nights and two aching days, Madge had burned in a fever of neurotic madness, and Marsden had frozen in a lethargy of waiting misery. Friends had seen him and sighed, whilst dishing up the scandal. Others had seen him and smiled, whilst magnifying the ugliness of it all. Then the grey hour had come suddenly to Madge, in the afternoon of Christmas Eve, and Marsden, with no hope left in his weary heart, had driven her home to the house in Jermyn Street. Mrs. Roberts came to the door of the solicitor's den to know if she could bring or do anything.

'Thank you, Mrs. Roberts,' said the man quietly 'Miss Madge will stay here for a little while, if you will come back in an hour, please. Thank you!'

And Marsden closed and locked the door, turning then to the worn old couch by the fire, where Madge sat, pale and chilled, but perfectly calm.

'Madge, dear,' he said slowly, 'are you well enough to talk?'

The fair head was bent in silent assent, and Marsden continued:

'Dear Heart, it is foolish for me to say I love you, even now in the greyness of everything; because, child, you know it so well, and I am so —powerless. My love is so—useless. There is something in you, Sweet, which is stronger than either or both of us; something we do not understand. A year ago I thought our love, and you and I together, would kill that something

and take it away from you. Well, Dear, we were wrong. It will kill us; and—it will kill me first. Some one said that to me a long, long time ago, but I did not believe it. I think you know me too well, my Madge, to misunderstand me.'

Marsden gently stroked the little hand which lay on his arm.

'You know that I don't mind being ruined, or dying either, for your sake. I would willingly go on and ruin myself a dozen times over for you, little girl, if I thought it could do anything at all towards killing this thing which tries to choke our love. But I don't. I think all I can do makes the something we don't understand only the stronger, and—Madge—it is agony to me. I cannot even ask you to be my wife in the eyes of churches and people, because of that ceremony of a long time ago. And so, feeling certain that all the pain, and all the ruin, cannot help you, I want to—to end it. Won't you say anything, little one?'

Madge slid from her seat beside him on to her knees, and, clinging to his two hands, she tried to speak. She could only sob out one word, 'Forgive.' And as she would not rise from her knees, Marsden knelt down beside her.

'Don't cry, little Madge,' he said softly. 'Don't cry, Dear; I can't bear it. You have done no wrong. The thing is not you, and it is stronger than both of us. Dear Heart, don't think that I could reproach you. I would not have taken from me the love you have given me

this year, if in return I could be allowed to live a dozen successful lives, each longer than the last. It is only because my ruin might mean pain to you, and going on with it all might make the something strong enough to kill our love before it killed me; only because of this, that I am going to finish it. Tell me that you understand me, little Love of mine, and that you know it is right.'

Madge's wide open eyes were dry, but her whole frame shook, as she said, 'Yes, Dear; I know.' She paused then, and clung more tightly to the man's hands, as she added, 'But, I finish with you; my—dear—Love.'

Marsden gazed thoughtfully at her. The whole thing was so incomprehensible, so outside human reckoning and reason, to the man, that he had long ceased to think of it as he might have thought of anything in any other life than theirs. For them it seemed there was no ray of hope of any kind in this life, and its very hopelessness, from its cause, might kill their love. Why, then, thought Marsden, should they continue in it? Perhaps the cruel tension of the last few days had been too much for the man; certainly he merely acted in accordance with his lights, sanely or madly.

'Do you mean that, beautiful little Madge?' He looked into the blue baby eyes, as though he would read the soul that seemed reflected there.

Madge was calm and thoughtful when she answered him: 'Yes, Dear! I know all you say

is true. It would kill me in time, and—Hugh, dear, I will not live without your love.'

For a long time they sat there talking quietly. At last the light of the winter's day had gone, and Mrs. Roberts came to the door with lamps. The housekeeper looked fully as sad as her master, and her thin hands shook as she handed a lamp to Marsden, and bowed in response to his assurance that he wanted nothing for another hour.

Then the solicitor drew a small white bottle from a pocket of the ulster he had worn that day, and emptied its contents carefully into two wine-glasses. These he placed on a little table beside the couch where he and Madge were sitting. Very tenderly he kissed her forehead and cold lips. And they sat talking for another full half-hour.

Then, together, they rose, and Marsden glanced towards the little table where the wine-glasses stood. He was sad, but quite calm and firm. Tiny beads of cold perspiration covered Madge's forehead, and her dainty, rosebud lips were grey lines in a setting of dead white. These lips she pressed convulsively to those of the man she loved; and then they drew apart, he handing one glass to her, and holding the other firmly between his own fingers.

'Good-bye, my wife!'

'Good-bye, dear Love!'

Madge's words were a gasp; but she raised her glass to her lips, as he raised his. Marsden's

glass was drained at a gulp, and it fell from his fingers to the floor, as he staggered, his eyes becoming almost instantly glazed.

In that instant there flashed through the child-woman's numbed brain, a glimmering, hazy picture of a brilliantly lighted ballroom—the room she had danced in on the previous night—white and gold panels; crimson hangings; flashing mirrors; glancing shoulders; the rhythm of dance music; the mad intoxication of the gratifying of hunger which the thought-flash told her would come again. The girl reeled backwards. The glass was at her lips, and Marsden's misty eyes were fixed on her, as he staggered towards the couch.

'Ah! you will stay!' he gasped. 'Survival of the fit—Spanish woman said so—My own Madge—God!'

Marsden fell like a log across the couch; and, with a scream of agony and terror, Madge flung her glass from one end of the room to the other.

Then, still screaming, she flew from the shabby little room, down the staircase, along the narrow hall, and out into the night of the London street; her little white hands tearing at the neck of her dress.

That was the real end of Hugh Marsden; and if, as has been said, he was 'an utterly unprincipled rake,' then surely rakishness is a goodly attribute, and virtue a lie. There is seldom truth in extremes.

Madge—survives. But the changing moons do not bring changes to her now. Perhaps she would not live, if it were not for the white-haired Scotch Puritan woman, who takes care of her.

A POET OF THE BUSH

'To sleep! To sleep! The long bright day is done,
And darkness rises from the fallen sun!
To sleep! To sleep!
Whatever thy griefs, they vanish with the day,
Whatever thy joys, in sleep they fade away;
To sleep! To sleep!
Sleep, mournful heart, and let the past be past!
Sleep, happy soul, all life must sleep at last!
To sleep! To sleep!'

TENNYSON.

I WAS sitting in my editorial den in the offices of the *Tenterfield Star*, and Tenterfield—any gazetteer will tell you that—is a small town on the borderline between New South Wales and Queensland. Speaking unofficially, I was at my wits'-end for want of news; as a provincial journalist I was of course overcrowded, and was obliged to 'hold over various important local items till our next issue.' A boy from the composing-room had just informed me that two 'comps.' were idle for want of copy; and I was standing, scissors in hand, meditating a piratical swoop on a pile of exchange papers, when some one kicked the door of my room.

Throwing down the scissors—emblem of Bush journalism—I picked up a pen, and ejaculated

the simple word, 'Come!' The door slowly opened and an old man entered. I say an old man, because he looked so very worn and haggard; but his long, matted beard was iron-grey, not white, and his thin, angular body was fairly erect. The weather-stained clothes he wore were very tattered, and on his head he carried the battered wreck of an old, broad-brimmed 'sundowner.'

This gentleman, I thought, is an aged compositor of alcoholic tendencies. He will ask me for a job, and, failing that, a drink. But as the light from my dingy window fell upon the old man's head, I noticed that he had a really splendid face. It is true his eyes and shaky lips betrayed the heavy drinker; but what I could see of a high, sloping forehead, an aquiline nose, and high cheek-bones—these were features of a scholar's face, and had a marvellously melancholy expression of saddened, blunted refinement.

The dilapidated old man did not speak at first. He simply sat down in a cane chair, and placing two bony elbows on my table, rested his shaggy head on both hands as he stared across at me from under the decaying brim of his felt hat.

I said 'Good evening!' and mildly added that the weather was warm.

He ignored this remark, and after continuing to glare at me in his half-sad, half-ferocious manner for two or three minutes, he said, with fine irrelevance: 'You 're new, I suppose!'

I felt that, compared with my venerable visitor, I was rather fresh, and I intimated that I had only been in my then position for some six months.

'You 're not long out from England either!' continued the gentleman with the beard. His powers of divination were great, and who was I to question his statements?

'Ah! Then you don't know Phil Launceston! Did you ever hear of Adam Lindsay Gordon's friend Launceston?—the man who lived with Gordon, and ought to have died with him!'

I said that I had heard of the great Australian poet's friend, but that I had never met him. The old man sighed, and his crazy hat rode further back on his head, as he said:

'Well, that 's me—I 'm Phil Launceston—the poet! Give me some money for a drink, will you?'

I gave him eighteenpence—my income was not large—and without a word he walked away, slamming my door behind him. Now, in Australia a man may buy three glasses of whisky or six glasses of beer for eighteenpence; and therefore I was somewhat surprised when the old wanderer returned to my room within half an hour. I regret to say that I was clipping paragraphs from a Sydney paper when he kicked my door open, and sat down opposite to me once more.

He took the scissors quietly from my hand as he sat down. 'Don't do that!' he said, 'I 'll give you some copy!'

I slipped a little stack of copy-paper towards him, blushing under his gentle rebuke, and sat down to watch him at work. He pushed the crumbling 'sundowner' from his head on to the floor, and running the long, yellow fingers of one hand through his iron-grey mane, he began to write. He wrote very fast, though shakily; and as he scribbled, he pushed the slips of paper over the edge of his blotting pad, and in front of me.

'Read it!' he said, as he began on the third slip.

I read it, and what he wrote was living music —not versifying, but poetry. He wrote like that, pausing at times to bite a piece off his pen, for more than an hour. Then he threw the pen on the floor, and, leaning back in his chair, gazed reflectively at the smoky ceiling of my den.

I hardly dared to make the necessary punctuation marks before handing the slips to a boy for the compositors. It seemed desecration in any way to interfere with poetry so true, and so sadly sweet. It was far too long for reproduction here; but as we sat waiting for proofs, he told me in his brief, jerky way, the story of what he had written.

'When Farnham the bushranger was hunted to earth by police and black-trackers, in Ironbark Gully, they found Mary Cathgart was riding with him. Mary was the girl whom some folk said he married in Gunnedah church—I don't know, but she was wonderfully beautiful,

and she never forsook him. When his horse broke down, and they stood at bay together in front of the Iron-bark clump, Mary stood before Farnham. The troopers had their revolvers levelled on the pair, and Dingo, the black-tracker, had a rifle pointed at the bushranger. Then Farnham sang out to the troopers, and he said, "If I give myself up quietly, will you let Mary escape?" But the troopers laughed—they thought the game was so safe—and they said "No," they would have the two. So Farnham turned round to the beautiful girl, and he said, "Good-bye, Mary dear!" And then he shot her through the heart with his revolver, whilst she was kissing his left hand.

'The troopers shouted and rushed in, but Farnham shot Sergeant Yorke in his saddle, and blew his own brains out, before they could lay a finger on him. That's what you journalists called the plucky capture of bushranger Farnham; and that is what my screed was about!'

He told the story roughly, but the poem brought tears to my eyes. And I had been a newspaper man for several years. It was late then, and when he had glanced at the proofs of his verses, he stood up, and held out his shaky old hand to me.

I said, 'Wait a minute, Mr. Launceston! I'll get you the money for your poem!'

'Sit down,' said the old man, as he jammed his ragged hat over his forehead; 'I don't want

any payment. Give me another shilling to buy some tobacco and a drink. You 're not my master. You 're a friend.'

Poor old fellow! I emptied my tobacco-pouch in a piece of paper, and put all the money I had in my pocket—it was only a few shillings—with it. A minute afterwards, the old poet had wrung my hand and walked out into the night. He had never been known to sleep in a house since his master—Gordon, the poet—had shot himself.

. . . . . .

Two years afterwards, I was sitting scribbling in an office very similar to that of the *Star*, but situated between five or six hundred miles further south than Tenterfield—the office of a Shoalhaven newspaper. I heard a slow, heavy step on the verandah outside, and there came a knock on the glass door facing me. I was very busy, and did not raise my head as the rickety door swung open. 'Some idiot who wants a paragraph,' thought I, and continued writing as the shadow of a man's body fell across my paper.

The new-comer sank into a chair on the far side of the table, and rested both arms before him, as I, dropping my pen at the end of a line, looked sharply up. It was old Phil Launceston, and if I dared I would say that he still wore that same fearful wreck of a felt hat. His clothes were as tattered as ever, his beard was several shades greyer and longer than before,

and the thin, bony figure was not so erect as when I had last seen it.

The man looked older, and greatly worn; but perhaps he had not changed as much as I, for he did not recognise me at first.

'I am Phil Launceston!' he said. 'Give me some money, young man, for I have been walking all day and I want a drink! Perhaps you don't know me; but—Hullo! Why, it's the man from Tenterfield! How are you?' And he held out his shaky hand and shook mine.

I called in a boy and sent him into the township for a bottle of whisky. Then I gave the ragged old poet some tobacco, and we sat talking till after the whisky had arrived, and my old friend had drunk two glasses of it. He told me how for years he had walked backward and forward, throughout the length and breadth of New South Wales and Victoria. He told me in language, rough yet beautiful, of dewy mornings on the tops of New England mountains. He told me of wanderings in the mallee scrub; of camping with blacks in the wild Bush west of the Snowy Mountains; of the great plains by the Darling; and of the green wattle patches and shaded apple scrub, where wallabies run mad and death-adders bask on logs, near the Duval Hills and Southern Queensland.

Then he laid his pipe down and pushed his glass aside, as he pulled a sheaf of copy-paper towards his seat.

'You know how Lindsay Gordon died?' he

said, looking at me with glistening eyes, and a break in his deep voice.

I nodded, and he began to write. His poem told of long days and nights spent with the since dead poet in his saddest hours. It told, in words that made the eyes moist and the throat husky, of pathetic appeals to the poet from his friend and follower. It told of the last melancholy hours of sad Gordon's life, and showed in weird clearness the endless grief of the writer who mourned him. The very compositors who put it into type were saddened; and as I read the proof while the old man sat before me, I could hardly see the words.

Then the wanderer rose to leave me.

'Yes!' said he, as he took my hand; once more refusing proper payment for his work, but accepting a few shillings and a pouch of tobacco —'Gordon was a good man, but only I knew him! The reviewers think they knew him, and sportsmen think they knew him—No! Only the Bush knew him, and I—And now he's gone, but I've got the Bush—the Bush that he loved—Good-bye!'

And the old poet passed out again into the country beyond me.

It was long after that that I heard of him again, and then I read this notice in a Sydney paper:—'The colony has just lost an old identity in the person of Philip Launceston—one time poet and bosom friend of Adam Lindsay Gordon, but of late years an unknown wanderer in the Bush. Within half a mile of the spot where

Gordon is said to have written his first Australian poem—the outskirts of Ballarat—the body of Launceston was found on Friday last, lying in the Bush. It is supposed that the deceased man must have been overcome by weakness, and being unable to walk into the town, laid himself down to die in the Bush which has for so long been his home.'

Poor lonely old poet! Perhaps it was as well, for in these hard later days he might have found it difficult, even with his simple needs, and great talent, to keep body and soul together in his wanderings!

NARITA

We were sailing by Triest
Where a day or two we harboured:
A sunset was in the West,
When, looking over the vessel's side,
One of our company espied
A sudden speck to larboard. . . .

". . . Yet I caught one
Glance ere away the boat quite passed,
And neither time nor toil could mar
Those features: so I saw the last
Of Waring!"—— You? "Oh, never star
Was lost here but it rose afar!
Look East where whole new thousands are!
In Vishnu-land, what Avatar?"'

WARING.

THE situation in which I first met Howard Kerr was characteristic of his queer personality. Our conversation on that occasion was very typical of the conversations we have had in all the odd corners of the earth in which I have since met the man; and I can no more say why Howard Kerr was on board *La Belle Aurore*, than I can give a reason for his having been in Ascension Isle when I arrived there last year, or tell why he is ever in any of the places in which I have met him.

I was in Tamatave, when *La Belle Aurore* was

taking her general cargo for Mahè in the Seychelle group; and I engaged a berth aboard her, knowing that the brig would load vanilla and cocoa-nut oil at Mahè, and that I should have a pleasant return voyage through the most beautiful islands of the Indian Ocean. On our way back to Madagascar we stopped for a day at St. Pierre, and just before we sailed again in the evening, Howard Kerr, with two coolies and a Gladstone bag, came on board from a little dinghy as though we had been lying up the Thames, instead of just inside a coral reef bar in the far South. He paid his coolies and dismissed them as a man might dismiss a Wapping waterman. Then he announced himself as a passenger for Tamatave, and went down below with the mate of *La Belle Aurore.*

Three hours afterwards, the moon rose like a huge globe of molten gold, and an ever-widening track of rippling, silvery light came glistening all across the Indian Ocean to where I stood, leaning over the rail of the little brig's poop deck.

I had heard, some time before, the look-out hand's cry of 'Light on the starboard quarter.' But I had seen nothing, and so was startled when, looking up suddenly, I caught sight of a fine brigantine-rigged yacht under an immense spread of canvas, overhauling us rapidly, and steering apparently almost the same course as *La Belle Aurore.* She was a poem—this queenly ocean racer—an ode to the glorious beauty of the Southern seas; and I stood enthralled whilst watching her skimming over the little phosphorescent waves,

as though bent on splitting *La Belle Aurore* from starboard quarter to port bow.

Closer and closer the great yacht came, till her long, white hull seemed to throw its graceful shadow across the deck on which I stood, and I fancied I could hear the hissing of the water under her sharp bow. I certainly did hear, faintly, the sound of an order given by one of the dark figures on her aft deck. Then the captain of *La Belle Aurore*, feeling, perhaps, that his dignity required vindication, raised a speaking-trumpet to his lips, and hailed the approaching yacht.

'What ship is that?'

'*Narita*—yacht! Who are you?'

'*La Belle Aurore*—Seychelles to Tamatave. All's well.'

'All's well here! Good night, *La Belle Aurore*! and—good luck!'

At the first sound of hailing I had heard steps in the little companion-way behind me; and, turning, I saw Howard Kerr, standing with one hand over his eyes, and gazing curiously at the yacht speeding past us. When the words: '*Narita*—yacht. Who are you?' came from the taller of the two dark figures on the yacht's deck, I heard Kerr mutter: 'Gad, I thought so!' As the sound of the last strangely unorthodox message reached us from the yacht, Kerr sprang on the poop rail beside me, and, with one arm through the after shrouds of the brig's rigging, and both hands raised to his mouth, he roared out, in tones deep and strong enough to render a

speaking-trumpet quite unnecessary, 'Good night, *Caballero!* And—good luck!'

Then I saw one of the figures on the deck of the yacht start suddenly forward, as though shot; and, through a speaking-trumpet, the words came booming towards me, in a voice which seemed to make the warm, soft air vibrate: 'Good night, Howard Kerr! *Narita* wishes you good luck!'

Half a minute afterwards, any word of mouth message would have been impossible, for the beautiful white yacht had forged ahead, and as the wind freshened, she rapidly passed beyond our ken to the southward. Then, for the first time, I spoke to Howard Kerr; and my remark on that occasion was as commonplace as his were, generally, out of the ordinary and interesting.

'That was a beautiful vessel, was it not?'

'Yes,' said Kerr slowly. 'One of the ships that pass in the night.'

'You seemed to know her; and some one on board evidently knew you.'

'Yes, I think I know her, and, certainly, some one on board knew me—once. Yes! You are a writer, they tell me. Did you ever meet Eric Vanburgh?'

'No! Is he the man who is said to have written *A Spotted Fairy*, and who disappeared shortly afterwards?'

'That's the man; and he disappeared shortly afterwards—from the lives of most.'

As Kerr spoke we drifted towards the seat by the side of the brig's companion; and without

any consciousness on my part of what we were doing, we sat down together, and Kerr began to talk.

'In eighty ——,' he began, 'Eric Vanburgh and I were in Nice together. Perhaps you know Nice?'

I nodded, and Kerr continued. 'Madame Arnay was at the very height of her glory then. I believe she had just made fortune number two at Monte Carlo. Anyhow, she was entertaining like a queen—if you can imagine a queen who was also an artist and a Bohemian. She had the Villa Croix, and she made of it a luxuriously beautiful palace of pleasure. All European Bohemia was at Madame's feet just then, and Bohemia never had a better excuse for fanaticism. A perfect artist, a perfect beauty, and a recklessly hospitable hostess; her Riviera palace was a very fitting temple, and Madame a very fitting high priestess to preside over the worship of pleasure.

'She took rather a fancy to Eric, who, with the style his wealth enabled him to keep up, was a fascinating fellow—as I think he would have been had he lived in a London slum. Following in his train, I basked, as it were, vicariously, in the sunshine of Madame's favour, and for a month lived with my friend a life of splendid excitement, in which the partaking of Madame's hospitality was an almost daily feature. At last I began to long for work again, and told Vanburgh I must return to London. He asked me to remain a few days longer in order that, with him, I might

attend a masked ball at the Villa Croix, which was to be the crowning glory of Madame's Riviera season. Then, he said, he would go to England with me. So, willing enough to be guided by him, I consented to remain ; and when the night of the great ball arrived, I drove out to the Arnay Palace with my friend.'

Kerr paused for a moment, holding his corn-cob pipe reflectively poised in mid-air, as he looked dreamily out to sea. Then he continued : 'It was a wonderful *fête*—of its kind, the most gorgeous function I ever witnessed—and when the splendour of it was at its height, I grew suddenly dizzy with the brilliancy and excitement of the night. So, turning out of the great saloon, where dancing was in full swing, I walked into a little, darkened conservatory, and sat down under a giant palm-tree fern, to think. "Oh, if I could put this into black and white, what a poem of fiction it would make!" That was what I thought as I sat in the shadow of the palm fern and gazed, first, through the open window of the conservatory, at the twinkling lights in the grounds of the Villa Croix, and then, through the door by which I had entered, to the brilliant saloon where I had grown dizzy.

'As I sat there, Eric Vanburgh walked in from the ballroom ; and by his side was a tall, graceful girl, dressed in the beautiful costume of a gypsy queen. Madame had insisted that masks should be worn on this occasion ; and so all the plain women among her guests had hidden their

faces behind satin, whilst the beauties—and they were many—wore inch-wide strips of silk or velvet, with eye-holes in them, which had the effect of heightening, by suggestion, the charm of faces in themselves sufficiently beautiful. The girl hanging on Eric Vanburgh's arm wore one of these narrow strips. They took not the slightest notice of me; and I could see that Eric was either flirting outrageously or very much smitten with his companion. They walked, in the dim half-light of the little conservatory, to where a piano stood, on the far side of the fern, in the shadow of which I was hidden. Sitting down before the instrument, my friend's beautiful partner began softly to play the opening bars of some plaintive, dreamy melody, I had never before heard. Then, gradually, and as though growing out of the piano's tender notes, the tones of a voice that was indescribably sweet and sad, came to me through the branches of the palm-tree fern; and I knew that the gypsy queen was singing. I could not see the singer, but her voice thrilled me through and through with its strange, lingering pathos. I guessed that Eric must be hopelessly enslaved.

'Suddenly, I heard a piercing scream from the far end of the great ballroom, and the notes of the piano behind me died away, as a confused roar of terror and tumult swept towards me, seeming to shake the very floor of the room I sat in. I cannot make you understand what followed. Better men than I failed utterly in attempting to

describe that same scene; and it was, in itself, something felt rather than realised. All I know is, that a great, surging crowd of terrified men and women—a shapeless mass of brilliant colouring—swayed through the doors of that little conservatory, overturning all before it, and carrying me along, like a match-box on the crest of a breaker; out across the wide, white terrace, down the sloping stone steps, and into the perfume-laden atmosphere of the garden beyond. Eric Vanburgh was close beside me; and, when I struggled to lay my hand upon his shoulder, I heard above all the tumult his voice, as he shouted, "Narita! Narita! Where are you?"'

Again Kerr paused, and I remained silent—waiting.

'Well,' he continued, 'the cause of all that, is history in the Riviera, as perhaps you know. The Villa Croix was burned into a huge, black skeleton that night, and no one ever knew in what way the fire originated, save that it was marvellously sudden, and began in the ballroom. Now, although Eric Vanburgh was by my side, his beautiful companion, whose singing in the little conservatory had thrilled me so, was nowhere to be seen. Hour after hour, till the sun was high above us, and the crowd in the grounds of the Villa Croix had gradually changed from a throng of frightened masqueraders to a gaping gathering of townsfolk in day attire, Eric and I hunted to and fro in search of the sweet-voiced gypsy queen. Two or three of Madame's guests

lost their lives in that fire. But Eric did not even know the name of his partner, beyond the title of her character which she had assumed, as he had assumed that of Caballero, as part of her costume in the *bal-masque*. Therefore, the names of those whose lives were lost gave him no clue.

'We spent a week in Nice, in the prosecution of fruitless inquiries as to the identity and fate of the beautiful girl who had sung to my friend; and at the end of that week, Eric started with me for England, as deeply grieved and shocked as I ever knew a man to be. We parted in London, and I thought that in a few weeks the Villa Croix incident would be nothing more than a sad and tragic recollection to Eric. Nine months afterwards, however, I met him in Berlin, and then I found that the man had known no rest since the night of that disastrous fire. He was wonderfully aged and altered; and I was more than a little touched when I discovered that, since our last week together in Nice, he had not paused for a day in his nervous, restless search for the gypsy queen; two broken bars of whose sad, sweet song were always ringing in his head. At that time I was preparing for a trip to South America; and after two days spent in listening to my persuasions, Vanburgh consented to leave the Continent and travel with me.'

Kerr stopped speaking at this point, and walked across the poop to look at his watch by the light of one of the binnacle lamps. Continuing then, he said: 'I must not stop to tell you all the details;

but,—after some months spent in Brazil and Buenos Ayres, Eric Vanburgh and myself started on our homeward voyage from Rio de Janeiro. Just as evening was setting in, some two or three days after our leaving Rio, we sighted a large, schooner-rigged yacht, flying urgent signals of distress. The steamer we were travelling in was immediately hove-to, and Vanburgh and I were allowed to take places in one of the boats lowered for despatch to the yacht. Our captain was an old friend of mine, or this privilege would hardly have been granted; and—things might have happened differently. As we drew near to the schooner-rigged yacht, we saw a boat lowered from her starboard davits, and almost immediately afterwards a great tongue of flame shot up from her mid-ship's deck in a column of black smoke. Our men lay on their oars for a minute, gazing in astonishment at the burning vessel, as its flames lit up brilliantly an horizon out of which all trace of the light of day had now faded. Then, as the men started pulling again, the roar of an explosion came from the yacht, and her hull was hidden under a pall of dense, black smoke, through which the darting flames could hardly penetrate. When this lifted, we could see that the very masts and yards of the yacht were blazing, and the sea all round was strewn with wreckage. After a few minutes, the boat we had seen lowered crossed the bows of the cutter in which Vanburgh and I were seated, and ranged alongside us. There were only three men in this boat, and they said they

feared that most of the yacht's crew must have been on board when the explosion took place. They added, however, that they had seen the owner of the yacht, with his wife, in the act of lowering a dinghy on the vessel's far side.

'For some time our cutters cruised about without finding a trace of any other boat; and at length, after a second loud explosion had taken place on the yacht, the last of her burning timbers were swallowed up in the black water, and our men began to talk about getting back to their own ship. Wreckage we found in plenty, but no sign of anything else could be seen, and so the order was given to return to the steamer, with a view to possibly waiting for daylight. The boat from the yacht, and the first of our ship's cutters, forged quickly ahead; and the one in which Vanburgh and myself were seated, was pulled slowly after them, too far in the rear for us to see the others through the darkness.

'Suddenly, our men stopped pulling; and we distinctly heard a cry coming across the sea astern of us. Turning the boat's head, the officer in charge, after answering the cry we had heard, ordered the men to give way slowly. A few minutes passed, and then, from out the warm blackness of the night, a dinghy, with its little mainsail half-hoisted, approached us; and Eric and I, from where we sat in the bows of the cutter, could make out the figures of a man and a woman standing in this little craft. As she ranged up to us, the man, whom we supposed to be the owner

of the yacht, lit a blue light, and, holding it above his head, showed to us, in the full glare of its ghostly light, his own face and figure, and that of his companion. Something in the beautiful face of the woman seemed familiar to me; and I felt Eric's arm shiver by the side of my own. Before I was conscious of anything else, he had sprung in one bound, from the seat beside me, into the black water which lay between our cutter and the approaching dinghy; shouting, as he jumped, the one word, "*Narita!*" Half a minute afterwards, whilst the dinghy still dipped up and down within a few yards of us, Vanburgh had clambered aboard her, and before the blue light gave its final sputter, I saw him grasp the boat's tiller. All this seemed to have passed in an instant of time, and whilst we in our boat simply watched. There was no sound save that made by the little waves that slapped against the gunwale of our boat, and I distinctly heard, in a woman's voice, the words, "Holy Virgin! Caballero!"'

Again Kerr paused, but only for an instant; and, resuming, he said: 'Then the dinghy dipped so close under our bow that I could have jumped aboard her, and I caught a glimpse of Eric, with the boat's teakwood tiller raised, like a sword, high over his head, standing before the man who had held the blue light. I heard the woman's tones again, and recognised them as those to which I had listened in Madame Arnay's conservatory at the Villa Croix. This time they seemed to have

been raised, as half in supplication: "My husband, Caballero!"

'Then Eric's voice boomed out from the darkness, ringing as I had never heard it ring before. And these were his words: "Your husband, Narita! Ah, but—God!—Put up your revolver, then! Hands up, man!"

'The men in our cutter shivered, but no one spoke, and I distinctly heard, or thought I heard, the sound of a heavy blow, before the flash which preceded the report of a pistol-shot gave me a glimpse of a dark figure falling from the dinghy's side into the water. Then I heard the creaking of the dinghy's little mainsail being hoisted, and the officer of our boat said, "Give way, men!"

'By some oversight we had left our ship without lights of any kind, and though we pulled to and fro in the tropical darkness for pretty well an hour, we found no trace of man or boat. Our men were nervous and excited, and I think the officer in charge was a little unstrung, when at last he gave up the search, and turned his boat's head towards the quarter in which we could see the lights of our steamer. Flare lights were being burned from her deck, and it was almost midnight when we drew alongside our ship, at the end of a long, weary pull in the dark. As the landsman of the party, I was the first to mount the ship's side; and, as I scrambled over the gunwale, the captain, stepping forward with an anxious look on his

face to assist me; said sharply, "Where 's the other boat, Mr. Kerr?"

'"Heavens!" I said; "you don't mean to say she has not returned!"

'It was so, however. Neither our first cutter, nor the boat we had seen lowered from the yacht, had been sighted by a soul on board the steamer; and though we lay hove-to till daybreak, in a stiff breeze which sprang up after midnight, and steamed backwards and forwards over the scene of the night's disaster, till the sun was well up in the sky overhead, yet we found nothing but portions of the yacht's wreckage, and one cutter, floating bottom-upwards, with the name, *Valoise*, painted in gold letters on its stern. That was all we saw. So when, three weeks afterwards, we arrived at Southampton, our captain had to report—firstly, the loss of a cutter, and a cutter's crew of four men and an officer; and secondly, the burning of a schooner-rigged yacht, and the finding of a yacht's cutter, with the name, *Valoise*, painted on it. Also—he had to report the disappearance of Eric Vanburgh.'

Kerr paused, and I looked up expectantly, as he flicked the ash from the end of his cheroot—he had finished smoking his corn-cob.

'And you heard no more?' I asked. Kerr rose and took a step towards the saloon entrance of *La Belle Aurore.*

'Six months ago,' he said, pausing, with one hand resting on the companion cover, 'I saw

a white, brigantine-rigged yacht sailing out of Sydney harbour. I was standing on the bridge of an inter-colonial boat; and with my glass I made out the name of the yacht. It was *Narita.* On her poop I saw standing, as plainly almost as I see you now, Eric Vanburgh. This evening I saw the same *Narita* again; and the voice you heard shouting, "Good night, Howard Kerr," was Eric Vanburgh's. That 's all; and—I 'll go and turn in.'

'Good night, Howard Kerr!' said I, unconsciously echoing his quotation. Kerr walked slowly down the companion steps into the saloon of *La Belle Aurore.* And so my first meeting with him ended.

MAGDALEN WILMORE'S LOVE-STORY

Horatio. 'O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!'
Hamlet. 'And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy.'

Hamlet.

'Though the pitcher that goes to the sparkling rill
Too oft gets broken at last,
There are scores of others its place to fill
When its earth to the earth is cast.
Keep that pitcher at home, let it never roam,
But lie like a useless clod;
Yet sooner or later the hour will come
When its chips are thrown to the sod.

. . . . . .

Take care of yourself, dull boorish elf,
Though prudent and safe you seem,
Your pitcher will break on the musty shelf,
And mine by the dazzling stream.'

Potter's Clay.

NOW the heart of the girl was pure and good—though its range of vision was narrow.

And this was the whole of her love-story.

All through the long, hot, dazzling summer months, when the sea was so blue, and the crests of the breakers so white, that one could hardly bear to look out at them from the sandy

beach; Magdalen Wilmore and the tall, fair man had been together.

Hadyn Valyard. His very name frightened her, when she whispered it to herself in the night-time, sitting at the little open window, through which, blended oddly, there came the smell of the creamy breakers, and the faint perfume of great, glossy magnolias. The name seemed to Magdalen, like the man, so much a thing of another world than hers. It seemed suggestive of some life strangely different from the quiet, decorous Puritanism in which she had grown from babyhood to girlish beauty, and from that to more beautiful, budding womanhood.

Even during this summer, which, for her health's sake, she had spent so far from the quiet New York home, and its even round of unchanging insignificance; even here, she had been disinclined to allow any one to see that portion of her life spent by the sea, which was really all the summer had meant to her. She had felt instinctively that the clear, white light, which filled the little house of the friends with whom she lived, was not the light to throw upon Hadyn Valyard, or her friendship with him—the friendship which had begun, she hardly knew how, on the beach, and which had been solely of the beach, and the sunshine.

In imagination she saw the raised eyebrows and the frigid distrust with which these quiet, one-minded friends of her quiet, one-minded

family would receive Hadyn Valyard if she brought him to their home. So always, when she had entered the little house for the night, she had spoken of the sandy beach, the sea, the sunshine, and her day's enjoyment of them all; but of Hadyn Valyard she had said nothing.

But the beach and the sunshine would have seemed very little things to Magdalen, without this golden-bearded man, with his wild, blue eyes, at which she dared not look. Yet with it all, she was afraid of him, and had said 'No,' when, kneeling at her feet under the wavy palms that fringed the white beach, he had prayed her, with tears in his strong voice, to be his wife.

His fascination she had strongly felt, but at this question of marriage she had told herself that there was something in him wanting, to make him really of her life. And she had refused. He had sworn that he would make himself of her life—that he would remove that difference—but she had sighed, incredulous, whilst, to soothe him, promising to meet him on the beach once more when a week had passed. And now she sat there in the shade of the great rock they had called 'our rock,' waiting for Hadyn Valyard.

Afterwards, she could never say whether, in the shade of the rock, she had slept and dreamed, or whether she had really lived it all; but it seemed to Magdalen, that the golden-bearded man came and sat by her side under the surf-

beaten rock. It seemed that as they sat there she said, 'Hadyn, tell me a story!'

Then she thought she felt the blue eyes, with their wild, untamed light, turn towards her, as Hadyn Valyard said, 'There is a story, but—— No, I dare not!'

And she said, 'Yes, please! Please, Hadyn, tell me that story!'

Then she thought Hadyn Valyard had raised his elbow from the hollow it had made in the sand, and, laying one of his strong hands on her arm, had said: 'Child, there was once a merman, living with other mermen and mermaids under the blue water out yonder, where the sun catches the crest of the outside breaker.'

It seemed to Magdalen that the sun was within an hour of setting.

'The merman lived very happily, Magdalen —very happily—as mermen and mermaidens mostly do. They have no little laws of must and must not; and appearances count for nothing under the sea. To be happy is to be good, out yonder, Magdalen, so benighted are the children of the sea! And pleasure there is not counted a sin.

'On a foundation of love and happiness they regulate their own lives, but they do not seek to regulate each other's lives; and if one does not understand another, he regrets his own want of wisdom, rather than the other's lack of anything. The mermen and women have no culture, you see.

'Well, as I said, this merman lived very happily, loved by and loving many, and holding that life was a thing to enjoy. One little mermaid, Magdalen, he loved more than all the rest; and this little golden-haired sea-girl loved him as she loved no other. There came a morning when the surge of the green water seemed to whisper some new story; and the rainbow light in the spray, that flies from crest to crest on the surface, suggested to the merman thoughts which had never before been his.

'The little golden-haired mermaid laughed happily at him as they swam about together beyond the breakers; but he felt in some strange, new way, removed from her, and the feeling hurt him. So strongly did it grow upon him, that, as the morning wore on, he drifted away from the golden-haired mermaid, and his other friends, and swam on and on till he was closer to the shore than he had ever before ventured.

'Then, as he lay idly floating in the surf, he saw, standing on the white beach before him, a girl—a beautiful girl of the world which was then a closed book to him. He raised himself in the water, and, gazing admiringly at the beautiful girl, he realised for the first time in his life that—that he was a merman. The girl seemed to him more beautiful than anything his eyes had ever seen; and as he watched her from his place in the surf, there came over him a great wave of desire—vague longing—to be something better, nobler, higher

than a merman. He longed vaguely to become one of the same creation as this beautiful girl, and, being of her order, to woo her, and win her, for his love, his wife.

'This was what he longed for; and, as the girl turned and walked away from the beach, he put his vague longing to one side, establishing in place of it determination. Acting on his determination, he swam along the sea-front for some distance, and then, stepping out of the creamy surf on to the white beach, he became a man, and, in appearance, of the same order of creation as the beautiful girl, whose name—was Madeline!'

Magdalen Wilmore shivered in the shadow of the great rock as Hadyn Valyard said this.

'In a little while he found the beautiful girl and became known to her, having first spent some time in studying the ways of her world, in order that it might not appear how strange to him was her life.

'Madeline, the beautiful girl, though she did not understand it, yet saw the difference, the something which made her life strange to the merman; and, lest others who were of her life should see the same strangeness, she hid carefully this friendship she had formed, hardly confessing, even to herself, that it was to her a delight.

'She found the merman, who was outwardly a man of her life, full of knowledge of a world she knew not of, and rich in strange lore of the great white-crested sea, across which she looked long-

ingly but unknowingly. She found his most ordinary thoughts were of things with which she was all unfamiliar. And this frightened her, she fearing that she did not know. But the man fascinated her, perhaps because he loved her so.

'Then there came a day, when, in the warm sunshine of the beach, the man suddenly felt that he could no longer hide his heart, and, kneeling at beautiful Madeline's feet, he told her of his love and prayed her to be his wife. Madeline trembled, for she loved the man, but all in her that did not know rose in her heart, struggling against love, and made her whisper, "No; glamour is evanescent, and love is eternal! This is glamour. He is not of my life, and so there must be something in him lacking, or something that should not be there. No!"

'The man from the sea felt sick at heart, but he said, "Madeline, I *will* be of your life; and there *shall* be in me, nothing that is strange to you! Madeline, let me see you again in a little while, and ask of you something then!"

'For a moment love triumphed in Madeline's heart, over that which did not know; and, acceding to the man's request, she bowed her head. So they parted for a while, the merman vowing to himself that he would crush into the narrow limit of the life familiar to her, all the wide freedom, the spray-scented brightness, which had made his life happy; in order to obtain the something which made her different from him.

'Day succeeded day, and the man found how

much the merman must lose—give up—to come within the beautiful girl's compass. He shivered sometimes, but he loved her, and he swore to pay the price, no matter what, to woo her and win her for his own. He pressed and cramped his much into her all, and began to feel that he was really losing that which had made him strange to her.

'When the time of separation was nearly ended, the merman sat in the evening at an open window overlooking the surf that bubbles between the inside breaker and the white beach. He was watching the sun sink into the sea; and he was faint and weary with the effort he had made to exchange his free mermanhood for a man's superiority. As he sat there, resting, and dreaming of the beautiful Madeline he had sworn to win for his own, certain sounds came softly floating in at the window, and fell upon his resting mind like sweet rain upon a parched green thing. His eyelids fell, and he sat listening in a dream.

'Other men of Madeline's world sat by him there; but they heard nothing, for the sounds were of strange, sweet music, floating in from the blue water out beyond the farthest breaker—the music of a life unknown to them. The sweetness of it made the merman faint, in his dream; but suddenly he started from his seat with eyes on fire, and his two hands flew to his throat, as he leaned, listening, through the window, breathing the saltness of the spray.

'Amongst the sounds that floated to him from

over the surf was one sweeter and more far away than the others; and this, he told himself, was the voice of the little, golden-haired mermaid who, in that other life, had been all in all to him. She had never gazed as though seeing in him strangeness, but only with happy, trusting eyes of sunny blue; and she had pleaded, never saying him nay, and happy with him, always.

'As the merman leaned, listening, through the window, and drawing deep breaths from the sea, a little, flying, rainbow-tinted cloud of spray flew up from the surf, through the rays of the sinking sun, and splashed across his hot face, cooling, but blinding him. Then, speaking no word, the merman stepped out through the open window, down across the smooth, white beach, and to the edge of the creamy surf-line. There, as he paused, the music floating to the shore was clearer and sweeter in his ears than before; and even the fainter voice of the little, golden-haired mermaid, with its plaintive ring of sadness, seemed closer clinging round his heart, as it was actually nearer to his body.

'He turned from the sea and looked towards the place where he had sat with beautiful Madeline. And then, in him, his first vague longing took the place of his determination. When he looked he saw only a little group, standing by the open window he had left, of the men who were of Madeline's world. And on their faces he seemed to see little smiles, half of wonder at his strangeness, and half of conscious superiority. As he

watched them the vague longing in the man gave place to another, distinct longing in the merman—for the sounds of music were more clear and sweet—and so he turned again, and stepped into the creamy surf.

'Then he paused a moment, and as he paused, it seemed to him that from the shore came softly the sound of a sigh—a sigh from beautiful Madeline. But the hesitating sound of the sigh died doubtfully away in a pleading strain of sweetness from beyond the breakers; and the merman gave a little cry of weariness and hunger as he plunged headlong into the tide, which was running out—out to the blue surface and the green depths from which the music floated.'

. . . . . .

Magdalen moved uneasily in her seat beside the great rock, and her eyes wandered up and down the white beach, as in search of something. Then she started to her feet, listening, with her golden head bent towards the sea. It seemed to her that she could hear sounds of music, faintly stealing in towards the shore; and then—a little cry of weariness.

Hadyn Valyard she could not see, and he did not come again!

WHERE THE SEA IS DEAD

'Whereto answering, the sea,
Delaying not, hurrying not,
Whispered me through the night, and very plainly before daybreak,
Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,
And again death, death, death, death.
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my arous'd child's heart,
But edging near as privately for me, rustling at my feet,
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me softly all over,
Death, death, death, death, death.'

WALT WHITMAN.

WE were about half-way across the great Indian Ocean at the time, and Oscar Herrmann and I, having arranged our bedding on top of the big saloon skylight, were lying flat on our respective backs and gazing into space. The poop awning had for some obscure reason been taken in that evening, and so the spot where my Teutonic friend and myself had slept for four nights in succession was left bare and exposed. It was not cool, however, even there—the air was too still and oppressive for coolness.

There were two features in his character which caused me to like Oscar Herrmann. One was his never-failing faculty for telling queer stories of his strange life; and the other was his perfect taste

in cheroots, and liberality in manner of treating me in regard to them.

Whenever I met Herrmann, night or day, he would say, 'Oh, good morning, my friend! How do you go? Have a cigar?' Now, when a man shows such undoubted intelligence and good taste as that, he deserves encouragement. I always encouraged Herrmann by accepting his cheroots—which were particularly choice—and listening to his queer stories, which were, to my mind, equally good of their kind. The result was that he was made happy in interesting me, and I heard so large a number of weird, outlandish tales, that one of these days I think I will make a book of the uncorroborated experiences of Oscar Herrmann. I should be credited with possessing the wildest and most fantastic of imaginations, and at the same time need only describe a few of the alleged genuine incidents of this man's life. In addition to these, however, there were one or two of his anecdotes that he was able to absolutely prove, by documentary and other evidence; and what he told me on this particular night belonged to that class of narrative.

It was one of those thick, black, moonless, and starless nights, that make one feel choky, and inclined to rashness in the matter of imbibing lemon-squashes—amber-tinged. There was sufficient swell in the oily-surfaced water to give the ship an awkward, lurchy motion; but apart from that, everything was deathly still and silent. Herrmann did not appear to be in a

talkative mood, and for a long time we lay smoking in silence. Then a fox-terrier that always slept by the skylight, put its fore-feet on my pillow and howled dismally, as though suddenly reminded of the hollowness of things in general.

'What an intensely melancholy effect a night like this at sea does have on one!' said I; turning on my elbow to drop a slipper on the dog's head.

'Yes,' replied the German, between two puffs.

Then we were silent again, until the black sadness of the outlook made me add: 'Really, I don't think it's possible to imagine anything more dismal and saddening than this hot darkness! Just look at that one patch of phosphorus away out there; it looks like a witch's fire!'

Hermann grunted. He was certainly in a peculiarly silent mood. At last he said:

'There's one place where you get nights more melancholy—nights that make you think of the Fatherland, and the girls you used to love, and other foolishness.'

'Where's that?' said I, brightening at the prospect of Herrmann's reminiscences.

'The Cape,' he answered shortly. And then, after a pause, he continued: 'When you are homeward bound in a sailing-ship, and winds are bad, you drive away and away down south, where you feel as though you had no right to be prying. You feel, down there, as though you were in one of Nature's private places—

a place that men are not supposed to see, and in which even albatross are intruders. It blows down there—Gott, how it blows! And a great sluggish sea runs in hills and valleys that never break, but sway up and down like cañons in an earthquake. Then it is grey—everything is grey—and there is no line between sea and sky. But it is when a gale of wind drops, that your sadness and melancholy comes. E' Gott, but it's awful! The wet sails flap and flog the masts, the sea still runs in grey, misty mountains, and your ship rolls gunwales under, like a log. First she dips one rail in the oily, solid water, and takes a great grey wall of it aboard. Then that falls in one mass to leeward, and the other rail goes under.'

Herrmann sighed plaintively. 'When I was down there in the barque *Schönhäuser*, we had some of the worst weather in that way that I ever saw, and we all grew so sad and wretched, that the very men in the fo'c's'le gave up singing chanties on the ropes. One of the hands told me that he didn't think it seemed right to sing, down there, where the sea and the sky were so miserable and the air seemed dead. We had a young fellow on board as second mate, whose name was Arlitz—Wilhelm Arlitz—and he came from München. When we were leaving Mauritius he had a letter from Germany telling him that his sweetheart was dead. Poor fellow! I believe he thought of nothing else. He used to sit on the for'ard hen-coop at night and croon over

his wild Münchener songs, and murmur about his liebchen, till one would have thought he would have died of sheer grief. Well, one night he was keeping the middle watch and walking up and down the weather side of the poop, while I was sitting at the lee side of the wheel. It was a night like that I told you of, but worse. Gott! how she rolled, and staggered like a drunken man! There was no phosphorescent light there, and the sea was like black oil moved by a volcano! No spray. No white crests. Only great peaks and caverns of black water, all mixed up with the black sky, and smelling clammy. All the sails were wet through, and creaked and groaned like dying men with every lurch of the ship. I heard Arlitz muttering to himself, as he wandered about, for half an hour. Then he leaned up against the low rail at the break of the poop, and I thought he was asleep. I was away for an hour, and when I came back he was still there. He had never moved! I was surprised, because it was nervous weather, and wanted watching. Then I heard him muttering again, and humming a Münchener song that sounded like a mother's wail at her baby's grave. Ach! it was sad; and I knew he could not be dozing. It began to rain then—a cold, greasy rain, without wind; and the sea was running as heavily as ever. At last I thought I would go and speak to him, he seemed so terribly sad. I took a couple of steps across the deck, and I saw his shoulders

droop. Through the patter of the rain I heard him say: "Frieda, mein Liebchen!" Then, in the wet mist, I saw his body rise and fall. There was no sound. He had dropped head first over the low rail, into the black, oily water, with his dead sweetheart's name on his lips.

'Ach! but it makes you sad—it makes you mad, to stare into that black sea when it runs in silent mountains in and out a black sky!'

'And didn't you try to save him?' I asked.

'Yes, we lowered a boat; but it was dangerous work, and we never saw him again.'

'What made him do it?' I asked, as Herrmann lit another cheroot.

The German answered me by instalments, between the puffs:

'Ach! God knows!—The Münchener songs—His dead Frieda—The black sea—Altogether—Good night!'

MOTHER CAREY'S CHICKENS

'O world as God hath made it! All is beauty:
And knowing this is love, and love is duty,
What further may be sought for or declared?'

The Guardian Angel.

CHAPTER I

THE MOTHERLESS CHICKS

'Do you s'pose mother's all the way up there already, Sonny?'

'How can I tell, child? You've been watching just the same's me. And you mustn't make so much noise, Els, 'cos it fwightens th' bull-fwogs.'

'But I'm so tired, Sonny. Do you think it's any good watching any more?'

'I don't know.' Sonny turned over on his back and gazed away up into the starlit sky, from where he lay, half-hidden in the grass beside the creek.

He was wondering in his childish mind at the deep, deep blueness of everything. The early nights of summer in the South, when there is no moon and the sky is cloudless, are very wonderful in their soft, fathomless blue over

indistinct, billowy blackness. The boy was only six years old; but he had been born in the great Bush—so silent to strangers, so full of life and sound to dwellers in it—and Nature spoke very clearly, and in many ways, to his quaint mind and heart.

'I don't know,' he repeated. 'But I think pwaps if God knew we were watching, He'd vewy likely make mother divisible, like in the 'Wabian Nights you know, before the angels took her up there. Old Jacky told me a coffin man would come to-mowow and take mother away; so I shall look in the coffin, and see what the angels took. Then I 'll tell you, but—I think you're too young, you know, Els, weally.'

Elsie was not yet five years old, but, like her brother, she had been born in the Bush, of parents who were old in a sense which made it quite impossible for them to ever understand these two children of their life's autumn. And, like Sonny, too, Elsie was not an ordinary type of child, even as Bush children go.

'What time is it now, Sonny?'

Sonny looked dreamily across the home-paddock towards the Gulgong hills, over which the moon would rise shortly.

''Bout seven, I think; and mother was killed 'bout half-past four. She must've gone up there long before this, Els.'

'Yes,' assented Elsie sadly. 'I'm 'fraid she must, but I'm sure we watched all the time. What killed mother, Sonny?'

'Sumption, child. You wouldn't understand if I twied to tell you. Evwybody beautiful has it when they get old. I 'spect Vi 'll have it just th' same, an' you when you gwow up; only you 're not so pwetty, so I don't s'pose you 'll have it so bad.'

'H'm! Sonny! I 'spose Vi 's our mother now, isn't she?'

'Good gracious, no, child! Vi 's always our sister. She can't be anybody's mother till she 's been mawied, an' got a homestead of her own, like this. I 'spect she 'll look after me an' father, and do things for us as if she was mother. Then, bimeby, she 'll mawy Cousin Tom, an' they 'll go 'way somewhere an' live by themselves.'

'Oh—Sonny!'

'Yes!'

'I heard father say, long time ago, before Mother went to bed, that Vi was going to marry Mr. Farley. He said so to mother, and he said it would straighten something up, and—I forgot to tell you, but I wondered, 'cos Vi hates Mr. Farley. She told me so.'

'Yes, I know.' Sonny was sitting up now, and thoughtfully stroking the grass at his side. 'But that 's a mistake, Els. You see Cousin Tom 's vewy poor. He 's hardly got any horses or anything, and father wanted Vi to mawy Mr. Farley 'cos Mr. Farley 's wich. But she won't all the same, 'cos Cousin Tom won't let her, an' she doesn't want to. Besides, mother

said so, when I went to say good-bye to her, this afternoon. She hated Mr. Farley too, only she didn't like to say so; but she was cwying, and talking about it, so of course Father and me said Vi should mawy Cousin Tom. I pwomised mother myself.'

'Oh, then I s'pose that's what Vi was crying about when we came out.'

'No, child. She wants to mawy Cousin Tom. She was cwying 'cos mother was killed. People what's gwown up always do that, to show they're so'wy.'

'Oh! Sonny, I'm so tired! It's no use waiting to see mother; she must've gone up now. Let's go back home, and see Vi.'

So, slowly, and hand in hand, the two children trudged through the long grass, up the side of the creek, across the rise of the home-paddock, to the great back verandah of Coorimal, the homestead of their father's sheep-run.

Violet Carey, John Carey's oldest daughter, and sister to Elsie and Sonny, was sitting in the shadow of the verandah. Her little brown hands covered her face, and through the fingers of them tears were trickling on to her wrists. Violet, aged twenty years, had been practically mistress of Coorimal for eighteen months or more, and for weeks had known that her mother could not live more than a very little while. But the end which had come that afternoon seemed just as sad, and made the girl feel just as lonely, as though she had never dreamed of its coming. She loved her

father, 'Near-enough-John-Carey,' as some of the district settlers called him; and the two had always been on happy terms enough. But good-natured John Carey was little more than a much-respected and loved friend. The woman who lay dead in the house had been Violet's mother in that word's fullest sense.

Only a month before, her father had intimated to her in his easy-going way, that Herbert Farley, the well-to-do owner of an adjoining station called Farleydale, would sooner or later ask her to marry him.

'He's one of the richest men this side of Mudgee, Vi,' her father had said; 'and will be a splendid husband for you; so mind you treat him kindly. Besides which, I may tell you that if Farley did not become my son-in-law he would very quickly become my successor at Coorimal here, for it's mortgaged up to the hilt to him, and there's been a sort of understanding between us all along, that things would be straightened up this way.'

Near-enough-John-Carey's relations with his daughter had never been such as to make the discussion of a matter of this kind possible; and beyond a few tears, and a murmured 'Father!' the girl had said nothing to show her feeling regarding her father's plan for the disposal of her heart and hand.

'Queer creatures girls are, to be sure,' the father had said to himself, after having explained this little matter to Violet. 'It's all the same; a death

a christening, a wedding, a handsome present, a kiss, or a scolding—it all runs to tears. I suppose, as a matter of fact, she 's as proud as ever she knows how, at the notion of being mistress of Farleydale. Anyhow, it 'll save me ; and, by gad, it 's a blessing he took such a fancy to her.'

Now, Violet's thoughts flew straight to her cousin, Tom Lindall, as soon as Farley's name was mentioned by her father. But she could not put her thoughts into words though her very life depended on it, for Tom Lindall was nothing to her but a cousin. 'Nothing more,' she murmured to herself insistingly. But Violet's mother had known better ; and perhaps Lindall himself, fighting the rabbit pest and the ti-tree scrub on a selection out back from Farleydale, would have placed a rather different estimate upon himself, and his relation to his gold-haired cousin.

Mrs. Carey had never gone so far as to say she wished her daughter to marry any man ; but in her feverish desire that her husband's plan of marrying Violet to Mr. Farley should not be carried out, she had from her bed of sickness put forward the claims of Tom Lindall.

'An upright and honourable young fellow, John,' she had said to her husband ; 'if he is poor. Let him win the child if he can, and if she wants him ; but promise me, John dear, you will never try to force her to take that American. I am certain he is——Promise me, John dear ! '

'Yes, yes, dear. She shall marry her Cousin Tom, if she likes, and go out back. The girl

shall never be forced to anything. Of course not. Certainly not.'

'No, mother. Don't you be afwaid; Vi shall mawy Cousin Tom. I 'll look after it myself; me an' Els, you know.'

'Bless the child! I believe you will.'

'Of course I shall—I 've pwomised.'

And not very long afterwards, the doctor had told Sonny that his mother was dead; and the child having gravely communicated the tidings to little Elsie, the two had wandered down to the creek-side, to sit and watch for the coming of the angels who were to take their mother.

CHAPTER II

LOSE A FRIEND

A MONTH had passed since the death of John Carey's wife, and Sonny and Elsie were growing accustomed to life at the homestead without their mother. Like many another English farmer, who, having proved himself financially a failure in the old country, has taken up a sheep-run in Australia, the owner of Coorimal was experiencing the fatal consequence of over-borrowing, underworking, and mismanaging a New South Wales sheep-station. But for the assistance of his moneyed American neighbour, Herbert Farley, Coorimal would long since have passed out of John Carey's hands and become the property of

the Commercial Banking Company. And now, since Mrs. Carey's death, Farley had given the Englishman very clearly to understand that the next few months must bring to him, Farley, either a financial settlement—a thing he knew to be impossible; the possession of Coorimal; or—and this seemed to both men by far the easiest and most satisfactory alternative—Carey's daughter, Violet.

Tom Lindall had ridden in from his out back selection to spend a couple of days at Coorimal, before making certain changes in his life; and on a sunshiny afternoon, just a month after her mother's death, Violet stood on the homestead verandah talking with her cousin. For some little time Sonny and Elsie had been sitting close to where Lindall and Violet stood, and now, at a signal from the elder, the two children rose and walked gravely out into the sunshine, and across the paddock, towards their favourite haunt under the bank of the creek.

'You see, Els,' observed Sonny, in an explanatory tone, 'you're such a vewy little girl, and it bothers them to have childwen about now, when Cousin Tom's going away.'

'Why does it bother them, Sonny?'

'Because they want to talk, and gwowed-up people never talk pwope'ly when there's other people about. And Vi's not so likely to mawy Cousin Tom if we don't let 'em talk, you know. We've got to look after that.'

'Yes. Sonny, what's Cousin Tom want to go

away for? We like him, and if he's going to marry Vi, why can't he come and live here so's to see us every day? Lass likes him too, an' she hates Mr. Farley's much as we do.' Lass was a great, fawn-skin-dappled kangaroo-dog without whom the children were never seen.

'You wouldn't understand, child,' said Sonny, as, their dog between, the two children stretched themselves in the grass beside the creek. 'I told you Cousin Tom is vewy poor, and he can't mawy Vi till he's got a homestead. Well, the wabbits an' dingoes an' things are awful out back of Farley-dale, so Cousin Tom's going to leave there. Now, he's going to the diggings at Captain's Flat, and when he's been there a year nearly, he's going to come back in time for Chwismas, and mawy Vi. You see he'll get plenty of money at th' diggings.'

'Oh! Where's Captain's Flat, Sonny?'

'Captain's Flat? Oh—er—I don't know. Out Merriman's Creek way somewhere. I know it's two hundred miles, 'cos I heard Cousin Tom telling father 'bout it.'

Late that evening, when Sonny and Elsie were sleeping quietly in their big bedroom at the back of the homestead, Tom Lindall and Violet were leaning in the moonlight over the verandah rail outside the window of the children's room; and talking. From very different causes, Tom Lindall had reached as awkward a position, in some respects, as that of his uncle, John Carey. In one particular he was better off, and that was in the matter of being free from debts or obligations of

any kind. But after two years' hard fighting on his lonely selection in the back country, he found himself poorer in every way than when he began. And now he had regretfully determined to throw up his selection. And all this while, he had been working in the hope of winning a home which he could have asked Violet to share. And now, he was telling her that on the following day he was to leave the district on a vague prospecting expedition, such as any Murrumbigee sundowner might undertake. And singing in his head, and forcing themselves every moment to his lips, were the words, 'I love you! I love you!' Yet he must say nothing, for he had nothing but his heart to lay at his lady-love's feet. So he smoked instead; out there where the sheen of the moon's soft light fell over trailing passion-vines, the stockyardfence, and the tall, gaunt trees beyond, making everything alike pure and beautiful. He smoked, and talked of the surfaces of things, save when now and then the man burst through in a sentence end, to retire awkwardly with a mentally whispered warning of, 'Skate fast, friend!'

'So you see, Vi, since waiting only made bad worse, and the rabbits and dingoes had all the fun, leaving me to pay the piper, I decided to leave them to it, and try my luck at the diggings. I had no capital, so I should have found it difficult to do that even, but for Farley's help. I told him about it, and he panned out very white indeed. He took my selection off my hands, giving me a good deal more than I had hoped to get for it,

and he's helped me with all sorts of hints and advice. He wanted me to go to West Australia, but I thought Captain's Flat was good enough for a first trial; and, Vi, if hard work can win it, I'll force something out of the place. Anyhow, Farley's a really good fellow, and I shan't forget what he's done for me.'

'Yes, Tom. I'm awfully glad he's been so good to you.' And then the girl paused, reviling herself inwardly for having up to this time disliked the American.

'Vi!'

'Yes, Tom.'

'Whatever happens, I shall be back at Coorimal in time for next Christmas. And then—Oh! I want to tell you heaps of things.'

The girl's head bent lower.

'You won't forget all about me when I'm away, Vi? You'll—you'll wait and listen to what I have to tell when I come back? Now I must let you go in. I know it's late. Vi dear, you won't forget, will you?'

'Good night, Tom! No, I—won't forget.'

And a few hours afterwards, Tom Lindall rode away with his two pack-horses towards Merriman's Creek. He had said good-bye to Sonny and Elsie early in the evening, for the full heat of summer was upon the country, and Tom wanted to be well on his way before sunrise, in order that he might spare his horses during a good part of the day; when heavy clusters of wattle-blossom would quiver and rustle breathlessly in the heat waves, and the very sun-loving carpet-snakes would

wriggle under fallen logs to escape the dazzling brightness of noonday.

CHAPTER III

HEAR GOOD NEWS

HERBERT FARLEY, the gentleman whom Tom Lindall called 'white'; for disliking whom Violet had reviled herself; and in cordially hating whom Sonny and Elsie had the whole-souled sympathy of their friend Lass;—Herbert Farley was a man who rarely failed in anything. One might say of him that he never lacked resource; or one might say he was never hampered by scruples or principles. Whatever one said, the fact remained that he very rarely failed. Two years before Sonny's mother died, Farley made up his mind that he would marry Sonny's sister, Violet. He had been barely four years in the colony then, but already he was a power to be reckoned with from Merriman's Creek to Gulgong. And those who reckoned with him found the American generally courteous, always inflexible, a past master in whatever tactics he adopted, and in all transactions either an open winner, or a man who gained by losing. And he made up his mind to marry Violet Carey.

A very casual glance round had told him two things: John Carey was drifting serenely towards hopeless financial entanglement; his daughter

Violet was fond of, and loved by, one Tom Lindall, an optimistic, open-hearted, iron-sinewed young Englishman, who was about to court inevitable failure on a way back selection, with a view to winning by his own hands and without capital, a home for Violet should she be willing to share it with him. At the end of two years, Farley held the father and Coorimal in the hollow of his hand; the lover he had enabled to proceed to a goldfield two hundred miles away, with what he, Farley, mentally called 'about enough capital to comfortably starve on'; and now he prepared himself to sound the girl's inclinations. Having removed its defences, he proceeded to take possession of the fortress.

For a month or two before Mrs. Carey's death, Farley had accustomed Violet to receiving from him one or two calls in each week. Now, on one pretext or another, he managed to ride over to the Coorimal homestead almost every day, and to become a serious affliction in the lives of Sonny, Elsie, and the dog Lass. 'It's widicklous,' said Sonny to his little sister. 'I've a good mind to tell him so, too. I pwomised mother, you know, Els!'

'Yes.' The younger child stared solemnly at her brother. 'But, Sonny! People can't marry other people if other people don't want them to; and Cousin Tom's coming back in time for Christmas.'

'Of course. Yes. But till he does come back, Els, we must take care of Vi.'

And while these two small match-makers discussed the situation with all that unquestioning confidence in their own ability to shape the ends of destiny, which surely is childhood's choicest gift, their sister Violet sat on the verandah of the homestead, talking to the American, and doing her best to be pleasant and hospitable to her father's friend. Farley had ceased to plead business with John Carey as an excuse for calling at Coorimal, and now, when he rode up to the house in the afternoon, he did not ask if John Carey were at home or not. He simply took his seat in the long, shaded living room, or on the verandah, and paid steady court to the girl whom he meant to make his wife.

'Sometimes, do you know,' he said, as he leaned forward to take a cup of tea from Violet Carey's hand, 'I feel half-afraid of boring you when I ride over in the afternoon.'

The girl smiled a grave denial.

'But yet I feel lost if I don't come. You see —Well, it is lonely for me at Farleydale, and I begin to think of how bright and pretty you make a home; and then it's only four miles, and—I'm not right in thinking you are sometimes sorry to see me, am I?'

'Why, Mr. Farley, of course I shouldn't be sorry to see any friend of father's.'

Their eyes met. Farley was watching the girl closely, carefully. There was a bright flush on her face as she spoke, and her hand shook

slightly when, two minutes afterwards, she held it out to wish her guest 'Good-bye.'

As Farley's grey horse sidled out between the slip-rails and into the apple-tree scrub beyond, its rider muttered the single word, 'Damn!' Half an hour afterwards, in dismounting at Farleydale, his thoughtful face set itself in lines of decision, and he said quietly, 'Something must be done with that fool of a cousin, and—at once.'

Though he had cleared his course of all tangible obstacles, Farley's shrewdness told him plainly that Tom Lindall's influence with Violet, even in absence, was an item of opposition which it would be better to undermine or remove, before playing any of his trump cards. Still he told himself that a little time, and a little more failure in Tom's life, would do much towards the removal of this little obstacle. So he waited, and John Carey's sanguine mind almost ceased to be occupied by thoughts of his precarious financial position.

Two months of dry Australian autumn passed, and news reached Coorimal from Captain's Flat, of a stroke of fortune which had come to Tom Lindall. He had struck a vein of what appeared to be rather unusually richly yielding soil, and already the sense of achievement had introduced a certain change in his manner of addressing Violet Carey; a change which caused the girl to blush and smile to herself, as she read the letter in which he told of his find. Her eyes

lighted up and a happy ring came into her voice, when, in answer to friendly inquiries anent her cousin's welfare, she imparted this good news to Herbert Farley. As was usual when in her presence, the American's keen grey eyes were fixed on her face as she spoke; and whilst missing neither the enthusiasm in her voice and look, nor its special significance to him, he yet introduced considerable geniality into his tones as he said:

'H'm! Well, now, I call that real good news, and in so short a time too. He'll be buying up all we poor squatters, Miss Carey, before long.' Then lowering his voice slightly he added, 'I hope gold-fever won't be as bad a thing all round, for your cousin as—as it is for some men.'

'But, Mr. Farley, why should finding gold be bad for Tom?' Feminine loyalty was glinting through maidenly modesty.

'I don't reckon it will; but you see finding gold sometimes means finding fever; and that occasionally causes—well, now, it causes a heap of things. It makes a man forget most things that don't show colour, and gold's a more important thing to him than ever his digestion was, or his immortal soul. And you know, Miss Carey, it's real bad business to neglect your digestion, and any parson will tell you the other thing wants taking care of.'

The girl smiled brightly. 'Oh! Tom isn't a bit like that, Mr. Farley. He isn't a miser, and I don't think he knows what his digestion is.'

'No? Happy man! And I don't suppose he knows what a whisky cocktail is. Ah, well then, there 's nothing to fear, Miss Carey.' The man paused abruptly, and stroked the head of a kangaroo-dog at his feet. 'Do you know, I think I 'll ride over to Captain's Flat this week, and have a look at your cousin's claim. I want to do some business in Hill End, anyhow, and who knows but I might find a little gold myself. We want it badly enough about here—as you may have heard from your father.'

Farley's voice dropped over these last few words, but his eyes were still fixed on the girl's face. The chance shot, whether politic or not, had told. Violet Carey's eyes grew moist, and her voice had a little tremor in it when she responded to the American's 'Au revoir!' At a time when her mind had been full of gladness about the poor man's good fortune, she was suddenly reminded of her father's expressed wishes regarding herself and the rich man.

'Tom,' she murmured softly to herself, as, when Farley had ridden away, she stood leaning against the verandah rail where the passion-vine climbed and nestled; 'Tom, I wish you could have stayed at Coorimal; but—oh! there is no gold at Coorimal. He said gold made people—forget.' Then she raised her eyes and smiled gaily at the afternoon sunshine. 'But not Tom. People are not Tom, are they? Why, what 's the matter, Sonny?'

'Oh, nothing.' The child looked disconsolately

up at his sister from the other end of the verandah. 'Only, I s'pose you know it 's vewy wude to talk to yourself, pa'ticklaly if you 're gwowed up!'

CHAPTER IV

IN THE CALM WHICH COMES, ETC.

FARLEY'S decision to go to Captain's Flat was formed and given expression to within the space of about two minutes. It was acted upon within twenty-four hours; and when John Carey ventured on a mild comment of surprise at his wealthy neighbour's sudden curiosity, he was answered by a cold stare, and a sharply worded reminder of the fact that he had taken as yet no step towards meeting his obligations to the American.

'And your daughter, Carey,' added Farley, 'seems more inclined to favour gold fossickers than men of her father's business. But perhaps I may look to your nephew, Lindall, for a settlement of our little accounts.'

The good-humoured smile faded quickly from the Englishman's face, giving place to very apparent anxiety, as he said: 'Nonsense, Farley. The girl doesn't know her own mind. They 're all alike in that way. But Violet 's not a fool, and she 's an obedient daughter. She 'll never say No to you when the time comes.'

So Farley rode away to Captain's Flat, where

Tom Lindall was working twelve hours a day to win something to offer Violet Carey—Violet Carey, a slip of a girl whom he, Farley, loved and wanted for his wife.

'And I'll have her, too,' he muttered as he rode along.

In his mind he called her 'a slip of a girl,' but at that moment the man's face was set very rigidly, and unalterable determination showed in its every line. To him, at different times, and in different places, had come already more than the average variety of experiences which come to men; but he loved this big-eyed, slim-figured English girl with all the strength he possessed. It stirred him right through all his coldness, the part of him which calculated and succeeded, and it reached that part of him which he would have called 'bed-rock'—the bare man, who was nearly all passion, and absolutely all unscrupulous. It reached this, and thrilled the man proper, through and through and in and out, sneering at the diplomacy of the man veneered, and insistingly telling him that all else was nothing, and that this was all.

Then he began to think of Tom Lindall, the man he had helped and been a friend to; and as he thought, his set features became more set, and the light in his cold eyes more pitiless. His thoughts about Tom Lindall were punctuated by spur marks on the sides of his grey horse, and their final dismissal was indicated

by a vicious cut across the animal's flank, and a break into a hard-held gallop.

'Somehow, my good Tom, somehow, you 've got to go.'

The American's lips moved as he galloped along on his way to his friend at Captain's Flat, but his teeth remained clenched.

Before reaching Captain's Flat, Farley had to ride through the township of Burrill, and at the post-office of this latter place he wrote out and despatched the following telegram :

'To Juan Gomez, 65 Park Street, Sydney. Come to me at once at First Nugget Hotel, Captain's Flat. Farley.'

Juan Gomez, a native of Argentina, and a resident of Sydney, was described by the metropolitan directory of New South Wales as a 'Financial and Mining Agent.' By a certain section of his acquaintance he was described as 'a devilish smart chap'; and others again had been known to say of him that he was 'two ends and the middle of an infernal scoundrel.' To Herbert Farley this man was simply a keen-edged and useful tool; a thing he could break up and fling away by a word to the police—a word he was far too politic to have ever contemplated pronouncing.

Tom Lindall was surprised and delighted to see Mr. Farley when that gentleman rode up to his humpy, just as he, Tom, was preparing to enjoy an evening meal. He was surprised, because he could not imagine what would bring

the wealthy squatter into a mining camp; and delighted, because the squatter came from a place blessed by Violet Carey's presence.

'Now that I've taken your selection out back of my place, I feel as though I'd a sort of lien on your interests generally, d'ye see,' said the American. 'So I thought I'd ride over and look you up on my way to Hill End. I was given all sorts of kind messages for you at Coorimal, and Carey hopes you won't forget us all when you've made your pile.'

Tom Lindall's heart warmed towards the friendly American who had helped him, and who had so recently seen and spoken with his lady-love.

'Well, I'm awfully glad to see you, Farley,' he said; 'and now you're here, of course you'll camp with me, so you can have a look at the claim to-morrow. I've heard of your mining experience, and shall be glad to have your opinion of my patch. Perhaps you might give me a hint about developing it. You see, want of capital prevents my doing much beyond pick and shovel work, and I feel certain the thing's worth more.'

'Ye—es. Well, we'll have a look. You might take me in as a financing partner yet, eh? Who knows?'

And then the men talked of other things. And when the great Southern moon began to pour its shimmering light over the tops of the black-butts and into Lindall's rough bark gunyah, the American, a queer glint of satire in his grey eyes, was

making his young friend happy with news of the girl-woman at Coorimal, whom, in different ways, they both loved; and in his turn was listening with attention to simple Tom's thinly disguised panegyrics on the same person.

Before three hours of daylight had passed on the morning after this strange conversation, Farley had satisfied himself that the young Englishman's find at Captain's Flat was a far richer and more important one than most people, including the finder, imagined. He decided in his own mind that the outlay of a little capital in the simplest kind of machinery would develop Tom's claim into a payable mine. Of this he felt certain.

'I don't see why it shouldn't be worth a little experimenting on, anyhow,' was what he said to Lindall. 'It won't want much capital, and, as I said, I've a sort of lien on your interests. You had better make the title over to me nominally, so that I can work the financing. I'll do that without interest, and draw a third with you. How'd that suit?'

In the course of the next day Farley became nominal owner of the claim; and every one at Captain's Flat knew that Lindall's claim was 'going to be worked for all it's worth.' On the evening of that day, too, Mr. Juan Gomez arrived at the First Nugget Hotel from Sydney; and in his face was something of the expression of a ticket-of-leave man, who, in obedience to orders, has left his business to report himself to the police authorities.

'Curse you!' he muttered, when he saw Mr. Farley striding down the main road of the township towards him. But he greeted that gentleman with respectful effusiveness when, a little later, they met on the verandah of the weather-board 'hotel.' He hardly allowed his thin eyebrows to move when, after some private conversation, the squatter said:

'And now as regards your business in this place. There's a young fellow here, an Englishman and a fool. He's just struck a pretty rich claim which I'm financing. The thing's in my hands, and he's a harmless fool enough, but for certain private reasons he's got to vanish. Do you follow me? Somehow he must disappear, and he mustn't be heard of in this colony again. Nothing like so difficult as that Paraguay affair of yours, eh? No relatives, nor will-copying, and enough hanging to it to make you, little Gomez—to make you quite respectable. You shall have a little gold-mine all to yourself, to play with. But if there could be evidences of the sad event, quite square and above-board, you know, I should like it all the better.'

The half-breed Spaniard shrugged his shoulders, and looked uncomfortable. 'I'm not a wizard, Mr. Farley, and this is not Paraguay.'

'No, but it's a mining camp, and you're the smartest man in it when I'm not here. And by the way, little Gomez, time is rather an object in this matter. Make friends with the gentleman. I'll introduce you as a financial mining expert.

If you could get him to drink a little—er—or anything of that sort. Make him neglect everything as much as possible, particularly letter-writing. And now I must go—or, wait! Come down with me at once to his gunyah. You have met me to-day for the first time, of course.'

CHAPTER V

A 'WIDICKLOUS' STORY

In view of the fact that Tom Lindall had, whilst 'fossicking' in a deserted claim, made the find which had so materially changed his prospects, he was perhaps to be excused for afterwards taking a somewhat exaggerated interest in those patches of land round about Hill End and Captain's Flat, which were regarded by miners as 'worked out.' Already, he had made up his mind that there was another payable reef in a claim situated on a spur of the Gulgong Hills, where, ten years before, some Queenslanders had sunk a shaft only to abandon it immediately afterwards as hopeless. Lindall had happened across this old shaft whilst prospecting a good deal off the beaten track, and was laughed at for his pains when he mentioned it in the camp. Its situation was regarded as absurdly impossible; and probably not more than half a dozen men had passed within cooey of the claim, since its desertion by the Queenslanders.

Now, however, the Captain's Flat mine being in good working order, Tom Lindall proposed to ride over to the Gulgong Hills to again examine the old shaft which had excited his interest. Farley, who seemed to have conceived considerable respect and even affection for the young Englishman, readily consented to accompany him on this little expedition. And so, shortly after sunrise one brilliant winter's morning, the two rode out of the camp together, each carrying a small coil of rope and a few accessories on his saddle.

'It's a queer thing,' said Lindall, as they passed through the still sleeping camp; 'but I've an uncomfortable sort of feeling that something unpleasant's going to happen me to-day. Very absurd, of course, and I suppose presentiments are all more or less a matter of liver. I'm pretty confident about this hill claim, too.'

The American smiled. 'Probably liver, as you say, my friend; or getting up too early. By to-night, I prophesy you'll be the owner of another workable mine—part owner, that is. I shall go nap on the partnership.'

Then they laughed, and the exhilaration of riding over dew-laden grass, through the sun-suffused morning air, which in Western New South Wales makes bare living no bad occupation—this served soon to brush out of Tom Lindall's mind all traces of his evil presentiments.

Towards twelve o'clock that night, when all Captain's Flat lay hushed and sleeping in the

uncertain, shadowy light of a winter moon, Herbert Farley, alone and leading his horse behind him, picked his way between the tents and humpies to Lindall's gunyah. Arrived there he unsaddled his horse, and, hanging a bell on its neck, turned the animal out for the night. Then he walked quietly up to the First Nugget, and, stepping softly over the verandah, tapped at the window of the room in which Mr. Juan Gomez lay sleeping —peacefully and restfully as the man without a conscience will.

Five minutes later, Gomez, with an overcoat thrown over his pyjamas, was seated in the little iron and weather-board office-bedroom, which the American had erected for himself near Tom's gunyah. Farley's face wore its usual inscrutable expression, and there was nothing noticeable in his appearance, unless, perhaps, that he had ridden fast that night, and probably for a considerable distance.

'Ah! Reach me that bottle of whisky, little Gomez. Si! The small one. Thanks! Well, you need exercise your 'cute brain no longer, Amigo, in regard to our friend's disappearance. He has disappeared. Um? Yes—gone of his own free will, and won't return—not to any noticeable extent, I think.'

'Ah! I wondered that you should have thought it worth while to ask assistance of a picayune like me.'

'So! Foolish little Gomez! You feel some regret over that little gold-mine you were to have

earned to play with, eh? Well, don't give up hope. The disappearance is arranged, but there's still some work for you. The effects are mine legally. I can show his signed papers to cover that; and besides, I don't say he has gone for good. You follow me? I don't say so. He retires with the dollars. Gone to England, perhaps. Likely! Yes, I think England. Now this is where you come in. That they should have wanted to send you to prison over the other side for forgery, was sinful. I always said there was no art, nor appreciation of it either, in the Argentine. See here. That's a letter written by our friend. I want another one—to a girl—and I'll dictate it to you; but I want it written by him. He's gone. Well?—Just so. But mind, it must be exact, Gomez. Girls' eyes are sharp.'

The South American nodded, and he of the North continued :—

'Well, then, let me see. Who do you think he knew best in this place? Yes. That man on the next claim, I think—Morton. You shall write a letter for him first, just to get your hand in for the girl's; and date it to-morrow, Mudgee. Confound it, that light's going out! I'll slip down to our friend's gunyah and get his lamp. Or, no —little Gomez, you may do that, I think. You know where it is.'

When a fresh light had been obtained, Gomez began to write at Farley's dictation. Over and over again the one short note and the other longer letter were patiently written and re-written, until

at last, surveying the two sheets critically by the side of Tom's own letter, Farley pronounced himself satisfied.

'And now, little Gomez,' he said, 'it's getting near daylight, and I want you to start for Mudgee at once to post those letters. Wait a moment! Did we say—er—where is it?' Farley quoted from the letter to Morton, Tom's friend. 'Ah, yes. Here it is. "I shall have a look at one or two old claims in the hills, and then go on to Sydney from here." Quite right. Well, now, little Gomez, the sooner you get away the better. I'll do the necessary talking while you're gone.'

Juan Gomez nodded, and walked out into the before-dawn darkness to find his horse. Half an hour afterwards Gomez was on his way to Mudgee, and Herbert Farley was sleeping dreamlessly in his own room.

During that day, Farley mentioned at the First Nugget and elsewhere, that his young partner was away prospecting near Mudgee; and on the following evening Morton, the miner on the claim next to Lindall's, received a letter from Mudgee to the same effect. Then Juan Gomez returned to Captain's Flat, and had a little private conversation with his principal.

'Look here,' said the American; 'what are you doing in Sydney, Gomez?'

The man from Argentina shrugged his sloping shoulders. 'The agency. It is still good—a good agency.'

'Ah! And you have Fernand still? A very

useful and excellent young man is Fernand. Well now, I think you'd better stay where you are, for the present at all events, and run this little mine. You can go down to Sydney occasionally; but on a certain basis I think it will be worth your while to stay and run the mine. What? I must get back to my station. We squatters are hard-working men, you know.'

The Spaniard's eyes brightened at mention of the mine. Yes, he thought he would stay, since he could thus oblige his good friend Señor Farley.

'Just so, my disinterested little Gomez. Just so. And since that's settled, we'll go into the business of the thing this evening, and I'll start back for Farleydale to-morrow.'

The American did not remain long at his homestead after arriving there from Captain's Flat, but having got rid of his travel-stains, started at once for Coorimal. There he was welcomed on the verandah by John Carey, who followed up his greeting by saying: 'Well, I almost wonder you didn't bring Tom back to see us before he began to talk of leaving the country.'

Farley's face, usually so hard to read, showed obvious surprise at this.

'Leaving the country? Why, bless me, he's only gone prospecting round Mudgee.'

'There, Vi, my dear; I thought you must be mistaken.'

Violet Carey had appeared at the open doorway, and now stepped forward to shake hands

with her father's friend, who, watching her closely, fancied he saw traces of tears about her big eyes. Certainly her face was sad when, turning to her father, she drew a letter from her pocket.

'I think not, father. In this he simply says: "I am going to have a look about the claims here first, and then go on to Sydney. Now that I have a little money to carry me on with, I think England"'——Here the girl broke off, and looked up with a brave little effort at composure. 'Then he says he thinks he will go home to England or to America, and he wishes us "Good-bye!"'

'Well, well!' The American spoke quietly and in sympathetic tones. 'I felt certain it would come when I saw how well he had done at the Flat, but I certainly didn't think it would be so sudden. And he's let me in for financing his claim, according to this. But of course I don't want to make a fuss about that. I suppose the lawyer at Hill End will have instructions. Well, I'm real sorry you couldn't have seen him first. Australia evidently hasn't much charm for him.'

And shortly afterwards, Farley was whistling softly to himself whilst riding back to Farleydale; John Carey was smoking lazily on the verandah at Coorimal; Violet, his daughter, was crying quietly in her own room, her tears falling on to a crumpled letter in her lap; and beside the creek in the home-paddock, Sonny was sitting with Elsie, and assuring her that the story they had heard that afternoon was 'widicklous.'

CHAPTER VI

IN BROKEN WATER

On the tenth day after Mr. Farley's return from Captain's Flat, a letter bearing the Melbourne postmark, and in Tom Lindall's handwriting, was received at Coorimal. In it the writer wished his relatives 'good-bye,' and spoke vaguely of difficulties which had prevented his coming to see them before leaving New South Wales. He was going from Melbourne to California by way of San Francisco, so the letter said, and did not think of returning to Australia. Into Violet's big eyes there crept now, the half-frightened, altogether pained and painful look of disillusion.

During these ten days Herbert Farley had only twice called at Coorimal, to see the girl whose heart's horizon he had painted grey; and during the two weeks which followed he came only once to the homestead which sheltered her and practically belonged to him.

'He knows I shall keep my pwomise, you see, Els,' said Sonny to his little sister. 'Of course it's all a stowy about Cousin Tom. He'll be here for certain sure before Chwismas, an' then he shall mawy our Vi.'

'Yes,' assented the miniature woman by Sonny's side, looking up into her brother's thoughtful brown face in trusting admiration.

As time wore on, Sonny was, with many dubious shakings of his curly head, induced to admit that he feared Mr. Farley was forgetting this 'pwomise.' And, whilst absolutely unswerving in their loyalty, the children were also forced to admit that even Herbert Farley was not without his redeeming features. On this one point their friend Lass differed from Sonny and Elsie, and persistently refused to submit to close contact with the American, without continued growling. If Farley threw the dog a half a scone, Lass would gulp it without winking, and retire, still growling. Sonny, on the other hand, could not but express his gratitude when the American presented him with a tiny dwarf of a brumby stallion, carefully broken to the saddle. Elsie, too, was gravely delighted when Farley gave her a complete and commodious homestead in white pine and walnut, for a doll's house. Also, the man's attitude towards the children was studiously kind and courteous, and so jarred less upon them than of old. Yet they both mistrusted and disliked the American, whilst maintaining towards him an air of the most frigid politeness.

Violet Carey at first dreaded the appearance on the verandah, of her father's friend, connecting him, as in some vague way she did, with her Cousin Tom's curious disappearance from out of the range of her life. But the American was so kind, so non-aggressive, considerate, and so unremittingly respectful, that this dread of hers soon gave place to toleration. She seldom saw any

one else. Her father entered hardly at all into any but the purely domestic side of her life; whilst the American was full of quiet sympathy on all points. So the girl ceased to dislike the man's presence, and began to hope that her father was mistaken in his prophecy as to Farley's intentions regarding herself. So week succeeded week in the quiet station life, and John Carey relapsed into careless good-humour with all men and things.

Late one night, some two months after Tom Lindall's last letter had been received at Coorimal, Herbert Farley, after an evening spent with Violet and her father, mounted his horse to return to Farleydale. As he rode through the silent Bush, and into the outlying portions of his own station, where the country was made more ghostly by the dead whiteness of timber long since ring-barked; he thought of the man who for a time had stood between himself and the quiet, tender little woman he had just left—the girl whom his whole passionate nature was bent on winning for a wife. He thought of enthusiastic, simple-minded Tom Lindall, and he smiled, a little sneering smile of conscious strength. Then a 'possum on a dead grey-gum overhead coughed quietly and dropped a twig on Farley's shoulder. The man gave a little shiver; and, as though to mock him, a jackass in a tree close by burst into a peal of cackling laughter.

'Damn!'

Farley's grey horse bounded forward under a

sudden pressure of its rider's spurs, and in another five minutes the American was walking the animal slowly up one side of his home-paddock, in the deep shadow cast by a line of wattle-scrub. A queer fancy was in Farley's mind that he could hear soft footsteps, close beside him in the shadow. Once, on the rise of the paddock, he reined in the grey horse and listened.

'Sho!' he muttered scornfully. 'If I were on the other side, I should begin to wonder if I 'd been having too many cocktails, and——Why, hullo! Who 's that?'

He had dismounted close to the outhouse in which he kept his saddles, and, turning, saw the figure of a man approaching him from out the line of shadow he had left.

'Great God above! What—you! What——'

The figure had reached the belt of silvery moonlight in which Farley stood; and Farley, iron-nerved and steel-sinewed, was shaking like a dead gum-leaf, as he stood with one hand on his horse's withers. The man he saw in the moonlight was clothed only in ribbons and rags of cloth. He was thin as only a starved man is thin, and his skin seemed shrivelled. His deep-sunk eyes blazed with a curious light, and his scarred right hand was raised, its blackened, crooked forefinger beckoning to the American.

Farley was gazing at Tom Lindall. And Tom Lindall knew him, and called him by name. And yet—this emaciated wreck of Tom Lindall, standing there in the moonlight, grinned, and beckoned

to him—grinned at him, Farley. Then Farley knew that the blazing eyes were those of a madman, and that the grin was the awful smile of a man demented.

Farley shuddered, and thought rapidly. There was no one in the homestead but his old housekeeper, and she, fortunately, was deaf and long since asleep. Suddenly a flash of memory seemed to pierce the clouded brain of the madman, and with a strange little cry he drew back, springing then upon Farley, like a tiger-cat at bay.

Such things will force screams from men, and insensibility upon a woman. Farley's thin lips opened convulsively, but he made no sound. Only, every muscle, every fibre of his great frame, was stretched in rigid resistance, as mechanically he closed with his assailant — a sane athlete pitting himself against a madman fleshless from starvation.

Four minutes later, bound hand and foot, and gagged tightly with a long handkerchief, the madman lay motionless on the floor of the harness-shed. And Farley, standing over him, drew a long breath and shook down his sleeves. Then the American walked out into the moonlight again, and, having rolled and lighted a cigarette, sat down to think.

The man's whole soul was burning with passion; passion which he believed to be love for the girl who loved the poor starved madman then lying exhausted and almost unconscious on the floor of the little saddle-room; passion softened by no

glint of tenderness, and dominated by no chivalrous impulse of respect for its object; passion which, whilst intense enough to make the strong man sometimes tremble, yet left him coldly calculating now, and as utterly unscrupulous as ever.

'Curse the fool!' he muttered, pushing his broad hat back to allow the night air to reach his wet forehead. 'How has he done it? Why does he come in my way? Mad too, mad as—— By God! Yes. I'll do it.'

He stood hesitating a moment, poising his half-smoked cigarette a few inches from his lips. Then, diving into one of his coat pockets, he drew out a bunch of keys, and walked towards a long, low stable, where two or three of the best horses on the run were usually kept at night. Moving quietly and without haste, he drew out a light tray buggy from its shed behind the stable; and, having carefully harnessed a powerful-looking black mare in its loose-box, he walked back to the saddle-room where lay the man he had struggled with.

The madman's eyes were wide open and staring straight above him. But he made no sign when Farley bent down and lifted him into an upright position. The ragged, shrivelled figure was a light burden, and without any difficulty the American laid it on the floor of the tray buggy. Then, having glanced at his watch, Farley led out the black mare and completed its harnessing.

Two minutes afterwards he was driving slowly down the winding track, which led to the home-paddock slip-rails.

Once past the slip-rails, and on the smooth Bush track beyond, Farley schooled his black mare into a well-held, swinging trot, which he knew represented a steady ten miles to the hour. Farleydale was famous for its trotting mares, and the American had not chosen his worst horse for this night's drive. In less than an hour he was on the main Dubbo coach-road, and there the light buggy span along through the soft dust, with hardly a sign of variation in the distance covered each hour.

All through the silent Bush night the black mare sped along; and during that time not a muscle in the American's set face relaxed for an instant, save once, when he started from his seat and turned half-round. A peal of thin, piping laughter had come echoing up from the floor of the buggy, where Farley's rival lay bound hand and foot, but ungagged now. Farley's lips twitched and his driving-hand shook slightly, so that the black mare's hind legs flew faster under the tray of the buggy. But the American did not speak, and poor mad Tom Lindall made no further sound.

At ten o'clock Farley crossed the bridge which leads into the town of Dubbo. The sun was pouring down its heat and brightness over all the country's face then, and the black mare's skin was streaked with thick dust, sweat-encrusted. The creases of Farley's clothes were filled with grey dust; his lips were coated; his hat, and hair, and hands were streaked; but his face remained set and inscrutable as ever.

He had driven a hundred miles in less than eleven hours; and when he pulled up in the court-yard of Dubbo Courthouse, his mare stretched out her long neck and gasped, while her stiff legs trembled, and her sides heaved convulsively.

A quarter of an hour later the mare was being rubbed down in the Royal Hotel stables, and Farley was talking calmly and authoritatively to Sergeant Lees and a Justice of the Peace, in the magistrates' room at the Courthouse. He had been set upon and attacked, he said, by the madman he had brought with him, whilst resting his horse some thirty miles from Dubbo, that morning. The poor creature was evidently starved, and looked like a swagman who had been bushed.

The whole matter was very simple. A good deal of sympathy was expressed for Mr. Farley, and the magistrate thanked him in open court a little later on, for his humanity in bringing the unfortunate madman to a place where he could be taken care of. There was nothing about the man whereby his identity could be traced, and the local officer of health was of opinion that he would not live more than a few weeks.

So Tom Lindall was by order of the bench removed to the Dubbo Asylum. And Herbert Farley, having engaged a room at the Royal Hotel, and telegraphed to Farleydale to explain his absence, went to bed and slept till early evening.

CHAPTER VII

ON A LEE SHORE

As September gave place to October, and the Australian summer danced and throbbed its way into existence that year, Herbert Farley lived a life which grew more strangely at variance with his character, with every day that passed. His life was one of quiet devotion, unremitting attention, and thoughtful consideration towards the girl-mistress of Coorimal. Saving perhaps when, as he was riding alone in the Bush, a couple of bitter, angry oaths would force themselves through his clenched teeth, leaving a grey, emotionless face unchanged; all the hot passion of the strong man who had lived his life for himself alone, was choked down by calculations born of desire, and impenetrably veiled by a cloak of unselfish devotion.

Perhaps deep down in his complex nature, some chord responsive to its opposite was touched and played upon by the perfect innocence and tender purity of the girl who mourned as dead the man who had never claimed her love—the man for whom she had not even the right to mourn. Perhaps—But the possibilities in the nature of the man who has lived his life as best pleased him, and in the world's outside places, are too vast. It is certain that part of Farley's growing passion was not only to win Violet Carey for his wife, but to make her give herself to him of her own will.

To the girl herself, the idea of loving any man would have seemed beyond the pale of possibility. She had yielded up her single heart to one who did not want it; to one who had simply gone away, giving nothing, claiming nothing, leaving her sitting in the greyness, like a bird with broken wing, staring at Fate. But the woman in her made her grateful for Farley's unobtrusive attention and kindness, and she grew to regard him as a faithful friend; almost, at last, to regret that she could give so little in return for the much that he gave. But all this while, he never once jarred on her sensitiveness by speaking of love.

Then, in November, Herbert Farley made a discovery. Nominally on business, but in reality to satisfy a certain curiosity he felt, the American drove over to Dubbo. There he made careless inquiry as to the fate of the madman he had brought to the town in the middle of that year.

'He's a curious case, rather,' said the visiting doctor of the asylum, in answer to Farley's inquiries. 'We never found out who he is or anything about him, and the man is still very weak. Yet I am inclined to fancy a change will come before long. I believe there's some one idea that fills the poor fellow's mind—something he has done or left undone, that his honour was pledged in regard to. He doesn't know what it is, but I fancy it will come to him one day when he's stronger, and then—he might become as sane as you or I.'

On the evening following this talk with the

doctor, John Carey dined at Farleydale in response to an invitation from his neighbour, which, in view of their financial relations, had caused him some uneasiness. He was immensely relieved, however, to find that the American was still more desirous of a matrimonial than a financial settlement.

'My dear Farley, the thing shall be entirely as you wish, trust me,' he said. 'I believe the child was a little cut up over young Lindall's off-hand way of leaving the country; but I will speak seriously to her about you, and in a day or so—er——'

'Quite so. Well, do so, Carey, and we shall see. I don't want to seem unfriendly, but, frankly, I don't care to wait much longer, and one way or the other we must settle things up.'

'Exactly. I assure you, my dear fellow, there need be no difficulty about it.' And as he rode home that evening, Near-enough-John-Carey thanked his stars that his neighour was still prepared to abide by so simple an arrangement.

'What difficulty can there be?' he muttered. 'She has no prospects, and he 's the warmest man in the district.'

The squatter was perfectly genuine in his reasoning with himself, and when on the following day he broached the subject to his daughter, he was shocked and astonished by her bursting into tears and imploring him to say no more in the matter. He walked to the window of the bright, sunny room in which they had been sitting, and stood tapping the open sash with his stock-whip.

'But, my dear,' he said, without turning round, 'what in the world can be your objections? I'm sure he's the most gentlemanly, as well as the richest, man in the district.'

The girl was gazing sadly out of another window, to where Sonny sat perched in a hammock on the verandah with Elsie. Tears were trickling slowly down her cheeks, and the pale little face looked a good deal older and thinner than it had been six months before.

'Father, I know Mr. Farley is all you say, but I do not love him. I—I can't love any man, and —Oh! I cannot marry him, father.'

The handle of the stock-whip still drummed disconsolately on the window-sash, and John Carey made a little impatient movement with one shoulder.

'I don't suppose Farley would be afraid of your not loving him, child. That would come later. However, you know the position, or if you don't, I shall say no more. If you are not Herbert Farley's promised wife within a month, we shall have no roof over our heads at Christmas, and your father will be a beggar. But I suppose you don't mind that, so——'

'Father! Please don't say such things. I—Oh no, I cannot!'

'Very well, then, we must take the consequences.' Carey moved slowly towards the door.

'Father! don't go away like that. If you——' By this time the girl had reached her father's side and laid one little hand on his shoulder. Then, as

she stood there looking into his smooth, weak face, her own expression changed. She brushed one hand over her eyes hurriedly, and the soft light in these eyes was all a woman's, as she said:

'Don't trouble any more, father dear. It shall be as you wish, and—you shan't lose Coorimal.'

The good-nature of the selfish man beamed all over Carey's face, and his heart was full of fondness for his daughter.

'There, dear, I was sure you would take a reasonable view of it, and—he is devoted to you. You will not regret it, my dear.'

'Father! you've forgetted your pwomise, an' you've made Vi mis'able. I haven't forgetted my pwomise, you know. Cousin——'

'Sonny! hold your tongue, sir!'

Sonny had crept down from his hammock and was standing in the wide doorway, looking gravely, reproachfully, at his father. John Carey took two quick steps towards the boy, and a very angry light was showing in his eyes. But Violet was before him, and in a moment had flung her arms round the child, with a little gesture half of caress, half of protection.

'Hush, Sonny dear,' she murmured. 'You mustn't say that, because it's very rude to father. We've none of us forgotten anything. Now, beg father's pardon like a dear good Sonny.'

But John Carey had left the room by the opposite door, and as he walked along the track to the stockyard he muttered to himself:

'H'm! what nonsense it is! God bless my soul,

I don't want to force the girl to anything. I told her so. Girls must be looked after—Damn the dog! what 's he sniffing at? Go home, Lass!'

When Farley called at the homestead that afternoon, he looked once steadily into Violet's face; and then, having chatted for half an hour on a variety of subjects, left the house, as he said, to inspect some sheep he was buying from a neighbouring station. He had seen that in the girl's face, which told him that he need not again seek John Carey's assistance to his suit. But he also thought he saw a light which indicated that one word of love from his hot heart would at that time freeze the sensitive girl into something like hatred of him. So he rode away, not to a neighbouring station but to his own; thinking closely, clearly, as a clever chess-player thinks.

For almost a week, the American, holding a viciously heavy hand on the curb-rein of his own passions, remained away from Coorimal. For that superhuman piece of diplomacy, Violet, attributing it to pure goodness and kindness, felt almost affectionate towards him. Then, on a brilliantly sunny afternoon in early December, he rode up to the wide, shady verandah. Half an hour afterwards, he had quietly, respectfully offered his heart and hand to John Carey's child-woman daughter, and had been accepted by her.

'Believe me, I do respect you and am very grateful, Mr. Farley. I do not love you, but—father says you will forgive me for that.'

'Violet, I will teach you to love me.'

The man's voice was perfectly modulated, and in his tone and expression there was no faintest hint of the turbid wave of passion which swept over his heart.

'And you will not ask me to—you will not ask any more of me, at once. You will not ask me to say any more till—till after Christmas, will you, Mr. Farley?'

'Till after Christmas; and then——'

'Yes. Everything as you wish.'

The girl's head was bent low, and a little while afterwards Farley left her, after respectfully kissing her little hand. Then Violet went to her own room, and sat staring, dry-eyed, at a certain homely-looking little belt made roughly from the skin of a carpet-snake. She could not have told herself why she had asked for respite till Christmas was passed; but had Sonny heard her request he would have perfectly understood it. But he was a child born in the Bush. And he was—Sonny.

CHAPTER VIII

CHICKS TO THE RESCUE

'SONNY, do you s'pose for certain, really and truly, Cousin Tom 'll be home for Christmas?'

'Why, of course, child. It 's widicklous the way you keep on asking me, Els. Didn't he pwomise? Well, when a man pwomises——' Here Sonny paused, and a horrible dread entered his mind.

'Hadn't father pwomised, and—H'm!' That was some mistake. Sonny lay silent, and gazed under the brim of his hat at the sky.

The children were in their old place under the shadow of the drooping wattle-clumps, on the creek-bank below Coorimal. For a week past these two had been growing hourly more nervous and excited. Little, questioning doubts would creep into their minds. Cousin Tom had not sent word. It was very funny, but—And then they would sound each other's confidences, and each in turn would insistingly reassure the other, Sonny always treating the slightest expression of doubt as a new thing, and an absurdity not worth serious attention. But as the days went by and no word came, Sonny grew graver and more thoughtful. And Elsie, as she followed her brother about the home-paddock—generally near the slip-rails or the creek—and in the house, became more serious and anxious. And the nervousness of children—such children—is pitiful.

Now, as they lay together on the bank of the creek, both were reflecting that in two days and a half Christmas would be upon them. And so far no news of Cousin Tom had come. Both these quaint little souls loved their sister very dearly. Perhaps more dearly still they were devoted to their Cousin Tom. And above and beyond all this, came what Sonny regarded as a sacred trust, a matter involving his honour and his very life. By reflection this was Elsie's trust too, and if Sonny's big eyes grew more solemn, her little face waxed more

plaintive every day, till on this afternoon, nervousness and wakefulness combined had produced something like hysteria in both children.

After plucking the grass at his side in silence for some moments, Sonny rose and walked to the edge of the creek, followed by his little sister.

'Els!' he said, turning round sharply. 'If Jacky bwings no letter fwom the coach this evening, I shall start vewy early to-mowow morning, and go to Captain's Flat to find Cousin Tom. I shall wide Possum, an' then if Cousin Tom 's got no horse he can come back on my pony in time for Chwismas.'

Elsie's face lighted up with admiration and delight.

'You 'll let me come too, Sonny, because Cousin Tom loves me as well. And besides, you can't go alone. I must come an' look after you.'

Sonny gazed thoughtfully at her.

'You 're vewy young, you know, Els, an' I don't know if a little girl ought to wide in the Bush; but—Yes, I think you can come.'

The evening passed, but no letter came from Cousin Tom; and, lying awake late that night in their beds, the two children discussed their plan of action. Very early in the morning and before any purple had shot across the grey of the eastern sky, Sonny stepped gravely out of bed, and, moving noiselessly about the room, proceeded to wash and dress himself. Then, having waked Elsie, he crept down the wide, shadowy hall of the homestead, out across the verandah into the dew-

soaked grass beyond, and down to where he knew his pony fed, near a bend in the creek. He carried his own little bridle with him, and, having caught the pony, he rode it barebacked up to the shed where his saddle was kept.

A few moments later, Elsie came out of the house on tiptoe; and then, holding his sister on the saddle before him, and in his nervous anxiety thinking nothing of such details as provisions for his expedition, Sonny walked his pony down to the slip-rails, and out into the great waking Bush of the morning.

The story of their ride is history now, in the country west of the Blue Mountains. But it is a lengthy history—too lengthy to be told here,—a story of the wandering in a country where are neither sign-posts nor farmhouses, and in which natives are lost and starved for want of a track; of two brave little children who feared nothing, save that they might not have time to find and bring back the man they loved, to the sister they loved.

All through the long summer's day they pressed on through the silent Bush; and occasionally Sonny would apologise to his game little pony for the undue strain put upon it of a double load, pleading the urgency of their mission as he did so.

'You see, Possum,' he would say, while the pony pricked up sharp, listening ears; 'the day after to-mowow's Chwistmas, an' there 's Cousin Tom's pwomise, an' my pwomise too, you know.'

Then they would push on a little faster, Sonny

never noticing that what had been a bullock-road at first, had now become a bridle-track. Perhaps instinct told him that his direction was right whatever the road might be.

Always mysterious and suggestive of things uncanny, the Bush of western New South Wales becomes doubly weird and ghostly, when moonlight flickers down between the tree-tops on to dry, twig-covered earth, over which 'guanas crawl, and bandicoots scamper silently. But all through the night, Sonny and Elsie kept tirelessly on their way, pausing only once or twice to quench their thirst and that of the pony, in the rocky bed of some creek. They had tasted no food for more than thirty hours, and had been in the saddle for twenty-four hours, when daylight came upon them glimmeringly, and Sonny noticed, with a little qualm of dread, that they were no longer on a track of any kind.

Happened to them then, the strangest thing which had come in their short lives. Excepting only a few kangaroos and the smaller animal life of the Bush, the children had set eyes on no living thing since leaving Coorimal. Now, as the light of another day came creeping through the trees, clearing up shadowy mysteries as it grew in strength, Sonny reined in his pony, and the two sat listening in wondering amazement to the thin, discordant notes of a man's voice singing, there in the heart of the wilderness. Elsie shivered, and Sonny tightened his little arms round her body, murmuring consolation in her ear the while.

'It might be a man who knows where Cousin Tom is, Els,' he whispered.

Nearer and nearer came the voice, and something in its tones made both the children suddenly to turn pale from a cause other than fear, and questioningly to look into each other's faces. Then a figure came into view on the crest of a little bare ridge before them. It was the figure of a man, bareheaded, and very ragged as to clothing. The man was thin to emaciation, and as he walked down the ridge-side he swung his arms loosely about him, rocking his head to and fro to the time of the monotonous tune he crooned.

Quite close he came to where the children sat on their pony. Then Sonny gave a shrill shout of pent-up nervousness and recognising excitement.

'Cousin Tom! Cousin Tom! We've come to fetch you—Els and me!'

The ragged man swung round on his heel, and stared in a dazed way at the children and their pony. Then he slowly passed one thin, bruised hand over his eyes, and, sitting down on a log at his side, began to weep; to sob till his whole wasted frame shook and quivered, whilst glimmering reason struggled to regain its seat in his clouded brain.

For one instant, only wonder showed in the faces of the children. Tears rushed then to the eyes of both as they clambered to the ground. Sonny brushed his eyes in a shamefaced way

on his sleeve, as he lifted Elsie from the saddle; and then they both walked to the log where Tom Lindall sat.

One on either side of the starved, hunted-looking man they stood, and Elsie nestled her little face against his beard, heeding not at all its matted state, nor the network of scratches and dried blood on the man's face. Sonny stood with one hand on the madman's neck, murmuring:

'Poor Cousin Tom! Don't cwy! You mustn't cwy; we shall get back to Vi in time for Chwismas.'

'Christmas! I—I promised——'

The man had sprung to his feet so suddenly as to throw little Elsie to the ground. Sonny frowned—a very little frown. Another instant and the man had bent low over the fallen child, who smiled up into his face, as, raising her in his weak arms, he muttered strange, incoherent words of fondness.

'Poor little Els! Poor dear! But it wasn't his fault, you know—not Cousin Tom's. He didn't mean to do it; and—he promised to be back for Christmas. Why, Violet—You see, the doors were always locked, and he pulled the rope up, so, of course, Cousin Tom died. A pity? Yes, because he promised—and she—But mind, he didn't mean to hurt little Els. He only hated the—Oh, my God! I shall have no time! I must——'

In some intuitive way, Sonny realised, and Elsie too, that Cousin Tom was not the same.

He was ill, in trouble, and weak. He did not rightly understand as they did, and must be helped back to Violet because of his promise.

'Cousin Tom,' said Sonny quietly; 'you must get on my pony, because you 're ill; an' Els an' me we 'll walk beside you, and then, if you think th' isn't 'nuff time, you must wide on quickly, 'cos to-mowow's Chwismas.'

But Cousin Tom's instincts were not dead by any means. And so, with many strange caresses and rambling snatches of endearment, he lifted both children on to the pony again, and, resting one thin arm behind them, started off through the Bush at their side. Very tenderly the weak man guided them through the scrub to the track they had left; very wonderfully and without hesitation, his instincts seemed to lead him to the Dubbo bridle-track, which is a shorter way to Coorimal than is the coach-road; and very sad, though very beautiful, was the working out of the clinging children's influence on his weary, struggling mind. But that journey is history too, now, and, like the other, a lengthy one, full of strange, sweet pathos, and the curious workings of nature acting through two loving children's hearts, upon the mind of a man trembling between hopeless madness and the return of reason. A doctor would have been fatal, but these children, these trusting, tender messages from the old love and the old life—well, they were children born in the Bush, and one of them was Sonny, and the other was Elsie.

When the turn off to Farleydale was reached, in the very early hours of Christmas morning, children, man, and pony were utterly exhausted. But even then, the man, his eyes still showing only vacancy, tenderly supported the two children as they rode. Suddenly he stopped, and gazing along the Farleydale track, passed one hand over his eyes. Then, holding Sonny's two arms so tightly in his bony hands as to leave blue marks on them for days, he moved his aching head from side to side, looking first towards Farleydale, and then along the Coorimal track and back to Sonny.

'No! Come with us, Cousin Tom. Violet is waiting. Never mind Mr. Farley.'

Telepathy? Possibly. At all events a very pretty instinct. But—the child was Sonny.

Then they reached Ti-tree Ridge, from which you can see the roofs of Coorimal homestead and the outhouses. Again the man paused for a minute, holding Sonny's arms, while on his own forehead great drops of sweat broke out and trickled down his face. But this time there was a light of recognition and understanding in the wild, deep-sunk eyes.

'Sonny! Brave little Sonny!' he gasped. 'I promised—for Christmas.'

On they went, the man staggering by the pony's hanging head, still with a ready hand at Sonny's side, till at last the slip-rails were reached and passed. A saddle-horse was standing beside one of the outhouses, and as the trio turned the bend in the track, which brings one before the home-

stead, they saw two figures standing on the verandah—Violet Carey and Herbert Farley. The latter had just returned from a search expedition for the missing children, Violet's father being then away with another party.

'Tom! Tom! Oh, Sonny!'

After a little scream, Violet stood there repeating her cousin's name. The children sat still on their pony. The man beside them stood shaking from head to foot, one blackened hand rising and falling at his side. Then his two arms were stretched out, and, for an instant, he swayed to and fro with parted lips and staring eyes.

'Violet!'

So a mountain stream bursts into a hollow when the dam gives way. So, at last, the name burst from him, and the girl flew to his side just as the man's whole form seemed to relax. As her hands touched him, Tom Lindall turned half-round, and his figure became rigid again, whilst his eyes flashed the intensity of sudden understanding. His right arm rose slowly, and his scarred forefinger pointed straight and rigidly at Herbert Farley, who stood leaning against a verandah-post, his grey, lined face showing no sign of fear, but only disappointment and a little weary curiosity.

'You 're Herbert Farley.' Tom's voice rang out on the morning air like that of a strong man. Violet clung to his left arm.

'You 're a scoundrel and a murderer! When I went down in the old Gulgong shaft, you hauled

the rope up and left me to die. You laughed when you went away and I shouted to you.' Tom's left hand touched Violet's arm. 'You 've tried to steal—my love, as, I suppose, you stole my claim. You thought I should die, but I only went mad. Then I got out of that shaft, which you in your devil's mind thought was my grave. Oh, God! And I came to you. I know, you see. You fought with me when I was dying; and you—you put me in that other place. Well, you see, I 've escaped from that. But you would have killed my mind, only these little children saved that—and body too, perhaps. Do you hear, murderer? These little children, they found me and brought me here, that I could tell you what a scoundrel you are, and—Oh, my Love! My Love!'

Tom's voice broke, and he turned from his work of denunciation to the girl at his side.

'Tom! Tom dear, you are here; what does it matter?'

Then Tom knew—all that he wanted to know; and his poor, weak frame relapsed. He leaned heavily with one hand on the pony and the other on the arm of the girl at his side.

'No,' he said. 'Nothing matters now. The children saved my life. I kept my promise. Violet!——'

Then he turned again, and his eyes were full of tears, as he said:

'Go away from this place, Herbert Farley. I forgive you.'

The American shrugged his broad shoulders.

'My friend, your forgiveness is little enough to me. I'm going away from this place because there was only one thing in it I wanted, and that's yours now. The game is yours—that's all; and I throw up my cards. Good-bye, Violet! Good-bye you, Sonny—and little Elsie!'

And the American strode off down the winding track; those he had left, gazing after him till his tall figure was lost to view beyond the outhouses.

Then the tired-out children slid quietly down from the pony's back, and as Violet led Tom trembling into the house, Sonny whispered:

'We've done it, Els. Now we'll go away, 'cos gwowed up people never can talk when other people's about.'

THE THRESHOLD

'You might have turned and tried a man,
Set him a space to weary and wear,
And prove which suited more your plan,
His best of hope or his worst despair,
Yet end as he began.

. . . . .

But you spared me this, like the heart you are,
And filled my empty heart at a word.'

. . . . .

ROBERT BROWNING.

'AND this is the very last time,' muttered the man as the door opened. 'The very last time,' he repeated, as he sat waiting in the pretty, glowing drawing-room.

Then She came in, and the room became beautiful, because prettiness was not of her.

They sat together and talked, and during a little interval the man's heart jogged his elbow in an irritating way, and murmured:

'This is the very last time.'

'Yes!' said the man, aloud; and She, smiling, asked to what his affirmative referred.

Then they talked again on various subjects which related to the man; for She knew all his past and something of his future.

'Why are you sad to-day?' She asked after a while. The man hesitated.

'Because—I don't know why I am sad—at least, I can't tell you.'

'May I tell you a little story?' asked She.

'Please.'

'Listen, then; but remember, my stories are not personal. There was once a man who never was a boy, because he had been unable to spare the time. Being a boy, or even a youth, uses up a lot of time at the beginning, when time seems short, and adds it on to the end; but circumstances, and loneliness in strange places, made it impossible for the man in my story to invest time in this way. So he skipped boyhood and youth, and went straight into manhood in a strange country.'

'And what effect on him did that have?' asked He in the drawing-room, who had become interested after the story's first sentence. She who told the story smiled, and, continuing, said:

'It had on him the effect of tropical sun upon vegetable life. It made him premature in all ways, but strong also, and glorying in his strength. A great deal was shut out of his range of vision, and his life's limits were narrow; but in those limits very intense. To him, the world was himself—he and his work—his aims—his strength. Nothing else, you understand. Having missed youth, enjoyment did not come into his scheme. He did not look about him for life's soft lights or its music; and so never saw nor heard them. He had no time.'

'Ah!'

'Yes, it was a pity. Well, then, one day, by chance, he met Femininity—happened upon her, munching cake and sipping tea. Femininity smiled prettily at the man, and offered him cake and tea, which he took with nerveless fingers, gasping and staring the while, in pleased amazement. Then Femininity's rose-dimpled fingers went tripping daintily up and down the keyboard of a piano, and she sang to him ; every note in her rippling little ballad twanging a response on one of the man's heart-strings. And he asked himself—Well, let me see. He asked himself——'

'Why,' interrupted He who listened in the drawing-room ; 'why, he had never known before that this was the world, and how he had been led to think that his life was the real life of the world.'

'Yes. That was what he asked himself. And so, dainty little Femininity, smiling all the while, drew aside the lace curtains which had hidden from his range of vision the Byzantine alley wherein she lived ; and he, looking down the alley with her, decided that it was the real world —that his world, so far, had been a dreary phantasy of his own creation. The man's lights were not wide nor deep, but very intense ; and, of course, he laid his heart—new found—reverentially and unreservedly, at Femininity's feet. Femininity laughingly accepted the heart, and then——'

'Meeting another man at the corner of her alley, said the listener, 'threw the heart down, still laughingly, and went back to the piano with her new friend.'

'Exactly. Well, now, the man was in a very sorry plight, because he had lost his own world—the self-created phantasy—and, being forsaken in the new world by her to whom his heart had been given, he could not find his way. Disillusion blinded his eyes with tears, and, groping about in the Byzantine alley, he——'

'He met Frou-Frou—You must let me tell this piece,' said the man in the drawing-room. 'He met Frou-Frou, who happened to have wandered carelessly from out her Moorish alley into Femininity's domain. He looked like a man, so Frou-Frou welcomed him with fascinating, lower Bohemian good-fellowship, and flung aside the rich drapery and heavy perfumed curtains, which had hid from his view the world of brighter, flashing lights, and dancing music, in which she lived. Looking into this world, the man drew a long breath of satisfaction; and as Frou-Frou challenged him with brimming champagne-glass upraised, he said: "This is undoubtedly reality—the abandon of real life in the actual world—unlike my previous fancies, which were absurd." And when the very first greyness came, and the flashing lights paled in the dawn hour, Frou-Frou, being tired and sleepy, carelessly laid open the pages of her frailty's private diary—and the man read. Having read, he knew, and was numbed. So, in the ghostly morning twilight, he groped his way out into the no-man's-land which lies between the alleys of extreme, and realised that he had not found the real world

after all. Still, he had lost his own, and when—Well——'

'No,' said She who listened; 'you cannot tell this part. I must; because he did not go into another alley, you know. He wandered into the cloisters of a white Greek temple, because, in the brightness of the sunlight which came after dawn, he saw a pure presence—a Girl—standing on the threshold. He approached the presence—so he longed for rest—though after his two phases he felt he had no right. She was so pure and white; the innocence of knowing nothing gleaming on her forehead. She could not, like the others, conduct him into her world, because she had not herself yet crossed the threshold of the temple; and she knew nothing of that which he had lived and seen. Still, she was a Girl, and his worship pleased her. Very sweetly, though all unknowingly, she helped him to take his stand beside her on the threshold; she understanding nothing, and never dreaming but what he, too, had the earliest phases to pass, and could enter her temple with her. But when her innocence of ignorance had spread itself round the man for a while, the crude purity of it—the——'

'The nothing knowing, nothing seeing, nothing understanding spotlessness of it all, almost choked him,' said the man in the drawing-room. 'And he realised that since he had not at the beginning found this world, he could not enter it now, or at least not accompanied by the cold whiteness of the "little maid who hath no breasts." So now,

in real despair, he turned away from the classic temple, feeling not only that he had failed to find the real world, but was unfit to be taken into it. Then, as he walked miserably away, an angel from Heaven came across his path, and laid her cool hand on his forehead, so that——'

'No, Dear! A Woman—only a Woman. But she showed him that he was already in the real world, and that she was, too; but that he had been gazing into little phases of life, and, thinking each was life itself, was almost broken-hearted when he found himself unfitted to *live* in a phase. He was very happy with the Woman because he loved her; and yet, thinking he must be *of* some one of the phases—the little phases—he had seen; not knowing that they were *of him* merely;—he fancied the Woman must be apart from him—that——'

'This must be the last time?'

'Exactly. But oh, the Woman understood. She knew that he was really of the same life and world as she. She thought—that he loved her; and——'

'She loved him?'

'Yes, Dear!'

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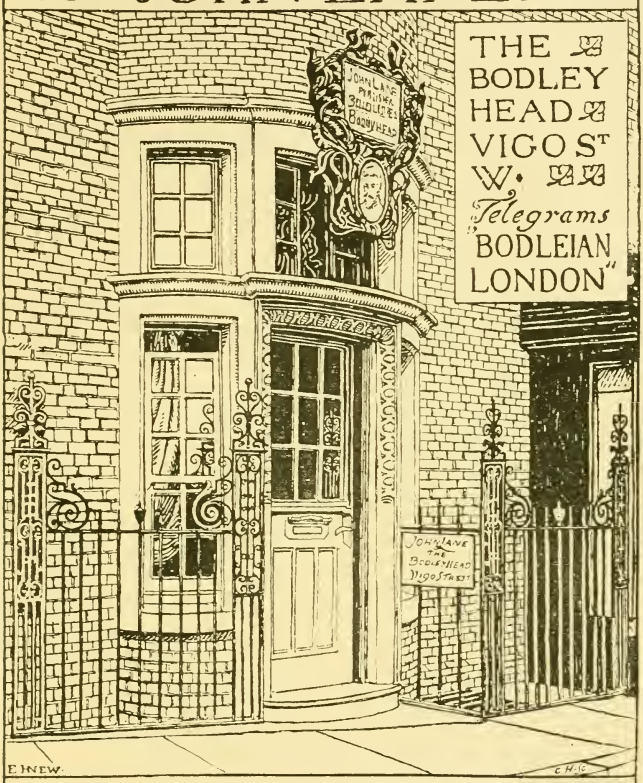

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